

THE SQUIRE OF ZABULOE

NOVELS AND STORIES BY
JOSEPH HOCKING

And Grant a Leader Bold
Not One in Ten
The Man who was Sure
The Constant Enemy
Felicity Treverbyn
The Man who Almost Lost
The Eternal Challenge
The Eternal Choice
Bevil Granville's Handicap
What Shall it Profit a Man?
The Wagon and the Star
Rosemary Carew
The All-Conquering Power
Prodigal Parents
The Game and the Candle
The Case of Miss Dunstable
In the Sweat of Thy Brow
The Everlasting Arms
Follow the Gleam
The Soul of Dominic Wildthorne
The Madness of David Baring
The Trampled Cross
The Man who Rose Again
Facing Fearful Odds
Rosaleen O'Hara
O'er Moor and Fen
The Wilderness



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THE SQUIRE
OF ZABULOE

by
JOSEPH HOCKING



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*The characters in this book are entirely imaginary, and have no
relation to any living person.*

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CHAPTER I

HIS HERITAGE

PETER ZABULOE opened the door of his rooms with his key, and stood on one side to allow his friend to pass in front of him

"You go into the sitting-room, Bill," he said. "I expect you'll find some drinks on the table. Help yourself while I go and get some cigarettes. I left them in my drawer. Drinks are perfectly safe in this house. My good landlady is the most confirmed abstainer imaginable. Bitter experience of the sweets of married life!" His smile was twisted. "But the little housemaid has a passion for my cigarettes."

"Or perhaps her young man," suggested Bill Lanteglos.

"Perhaps. Especially as tobacco sometimes goes, too!"

It was a comfortable room of its sort. A fire was burning gaily and the two deep chairs which flanked the fire-place were very inviting. Bill Lanteglos helped himself to a long glass of very mild whisky and soda, and then sank down into one of the chairs with a sigh of contentment.

"You do yourself remarkably well for a man who's always complaining of poverty," he remarked with a grin, as Peter appeared in the doorway. "It's my belief that you're an utter fraud, my dear old chap."

The other shrugged his broad shoulders.

"Well, I admit that I shan't need to complain of poverty any more."

Bill raised his eyebrows.

"Luck turned?"

"Yes. I suppose it might be put that way."

"A big case?"

"Several . . . just when I need no longer bother if I never have another in my life! That's how things go in this world!"

"What on earth do you mean?"

Peter threw himself into the chair opposite to his friend.

"Well, that old uncle of mine has left me a fortune. Queer old beggar. No one could have guessed from the way he lived that he had anything more than enough to run his particularly modest establishment. I'm not certain, yet, of just what it's going to work out at, but something not far off twelve thousand a year, they tell me!"

Bill's cheerful face lit up with astonishment.

"Twelve thousand! I say, that's pretty handsome!" he said in awe. "And what do you intend to do with it? Retire? Hardly, I suppose, now that you've started to get into the swim. I do congratulate you, old fellow. It was about time something happened to you to get you out of your own particular little pit of gloom. Now perhaps you'll be a bit more cheerful, though I can't say you've shown much sign of it this evening. You've not been the kind of enlivening companion anyone would have expected from a man who'd just come into a fortune."

"No?" Peter's handsome face was a little grim. "Well, and I can't really say I feel like that, either. My fortune's come a bit too late"

"You're an ungrateful sort of chap, Peter! My word! If a fortune would only come my way, for once . . ."

"Well, and what would you do with it?" Peter looked at his friend with mild interest, but never really lightened the dour expression which seemed to be natural

to him. The lines between the eyebrows, the long folds from nostril to the corners of his mouth, both told their story. It was the face of a man who had not for years felt contented with his lot. And yet it was an interesting face. There was a promise of a keen intellect in the deep-set eyes; the firm mouth, if a little hard and uncompromising, was not lacking in hidden humour, but one guessed that the humour was always held well in hand. The forehead was high under its thick dark hair. Altogether it was a face with possibilities.

"What I'd do with it?" Bill Lanteglos hesitated, and then laughed lightly. "That's a bit of a poser. I suppose I'd give Marion a thoroughly good holiday, first of all. Somewhere where we'd both manage to enjoy ourselves and yet not waste our time. There are a thousand things we both want to see. We've a good deal to learn, in our job, you know. And then I'd try to branch out a bit. I don't really enjoy working on the technical details of the interiors of office buildings, Peter, but that's about all I get a chance of doing, you know. I'd dearly like the time to work at some big competition or other. That's the way to get a real start and a chance at doing the kind of work I've always longed to do. And then," there was a curiously young and shy flush on Lanteglos's likeable face as he paused a moment, as if unsure whether to go on with his sentence, "well, I'm afraid you'll hardly sympathise with me here, but I've always wanted to build an orphanage."

"An orphanage! Good Lord! What next!"

"Oh, I know. You were bound to think me a little mad, but Marion and I haven't any kids of our own, and we've both got ideas about the way an orphanage ought to be run. We'd love to build one on our own lines, fit it out, and organise it in the way we think it should go. After all, with all that money, it would be only fair to let someone besides ourselves benefit by our good fortune."

Peter shrugged his shoulders.

"Still the same optimist, the same altruist, the same everlasting Quaker!" he said, with a faint suggestion of a sneer.

"Well, if I am a Quaker, I see no reason to be ashamed of it." His friend answered him very quietly, but there was a very stern look in his grey eyes as they met the deep-set blue ones. "And you'd be a far happier man, if you were something of the sort yourself."

"Oh, come! A Quaker? Me?" Peter laughed shortly. "Well, I shan't be building many orphanages with my money, you may be sure of that. It's come too late to bring me any particular enthusiasm. A couple of years ago I'd have been glad to have been spared a bit of drudgery. Eight years ago . . ."

Bill looked up quickly.

"Eight years ago?" he asked eagerly.

"Oh, I suppose I should have got married on it—the more fool I!"

There was no mistaking the bitterness in his voice.

"Married? That's the first I've heard about that."

"Yes. It wasn't an episode I'd be likely to boast about. It wasn't particularly flattering to my charms. I don't think you even met the girl."

"Who was it?" Bill asked very tentatively.

"Laura Warren."

"What! The barrister's daughter? She married John Felton, didn't she? I think I met them the other day at a reception of some sort."

Peter nodded with a grim smile.

"Yes—she married him about six months after telling me that I was the only man in the world that she could ever love or with whom she could ever be happy; that she'd wait for me for years if need be, because she had such utter confidence in my success. She'd been waiting—if one can call it waiting—about four months at that time, but her father wasn't so full of confidence as she.

He wouldn't consent to a public engagement. Just as well, as it turned out. It spared me a little of the humiliation I should have had to have gone through when she decided that, after all, there was another man better qualified to make her happy! He'd got a clear two thousand a year outside anything he could earn, you see, and a solicitor uncle who handed him any number of good cases. If I'd had my twelve thousand I'd have stood a better chance. I expect I should be busy trying to make her happy at this moment. Father of a numerous family, perhaps!" He laughed, a short, harsh little laugh. "Think what I've missed because my legacy has come eight years too late!"

"Think what you've been spared!"

Peter looked at his friend with a stare.

"Oh, yes! Think what you've been spared, my dear fellow. That girl can't have been worth much if it was only money she was interested in. You've missed absolutely nothing, unless you count the disillusionment you'd have had. Good Lord, Peter, instead of grumbling, you ought to be jolly thankful to your old uncle. It's done you a lot of good to have to work hard. You'd not have made much of a barrister if you hadn't had to work for it. It never did any man any harm to put up with a bit of hardship and drudgery." He glanced round the comfortable room again. "This is good enough for anybody—until you're married, of course."

"Married!" his friend scoffed. "Well, may Heaven preserve me from that, anyway."

"You might do worse. Look at me." grinned Bill, "I'm the happiest man I know. Married, though."

"Yes. But there aren't many like Marion in the world. You say you saw Laura Warren—I beg her pardon—Laura Felton, I mean, the other day. I met her myself only recently. Would you like to be married to her? Look what a few years of married life have done for her. She's—well, she's matronly, dull, fat,

thoroughly uninteresting. And yet she used to be one of the loveliest things imaginable. Springtime personified ! ”

Bill raised his eyebrows in a comic grimace.

“ As bad as that, was it ? ”

Peter filled his pipe in silence for a minute or two, ramming in the tobacco with an energy which seemed almost excessive for the task.

“ Yes,” he said at last, “ I was very hard hit indeed. I’ve never been a man to pay much attention to women, and she—well, she bowled me over. I was completely knocked out when she threw me over, and my work suffered. It took me a long time to get over it, fool that I was, but I’m cured now ! You won’t get me again that way. Don’t talk to me about marriage, Bill. It isn’t a welcome subject. Your case is an exception. Marion is one woman in a million. You’re lucky. That’s all.”

Lanteglos eyed his friend from under half-closed lids, apparently paying him no attention, but examining him carefully all the time. There was too much bitterness in that handsome face for its owner’s thirty-eight years, too much disillusion. And yet Peter Zabuloe had been a cheerful and amusing enough companion in the old days, when they had been at Winchester together, and even the bad days of the war had never managed to break down his incurable optimism, until, in the last few days before the Armistice, John Zabuloe, the father he had almost idolised, had been killed behind the lines by a chance shell. That had seemed to wipe out at one stroke all the gaiety, the joy, even the hope, from the son’s life. From that time onwards the whole nature of the man had changed.

And now even this miraculous inheritance, which should surely be a turning-point, had not seemed to raise him from his self-imposed rut of gloom.

“ Well, old boy, this piece of luck should surely show you that there is something in life, after all,” he hazarded.

Peter raised his eyebrows.

"You think so? I call it a damnable farce. What it gives with one hand it usually takes away with the other. It let me get through the war scot-free—but it killed my father ten days before the end, with safety in sight. It let me slave for years, give up every pleasure, and then, just when I'm ready to break through on my own account, it throws a useless fortune at my head. It let me wrap up my every hope in one woman, make her my one exception, the one person on earth in whom I really trusted—and then showed me how worthless she was! A mockery, my dear chap."

"But she isn't the only girl in the world, I tell you."

"It's no good, Bill. I've done with women, as far as I'm concerned. I believed in that girl. I'm not going to make a fool of myself again. I'll give no other woman a chance to play with me."

He got to his feet and stood with his back to the fire looking down at his friend, bitterness in the line of his mouth and in the frown which had become permanent on his broad forehead. A silence fell for a few minutes between the two.

"Come, Bill," said Peter at last, "you're an optimist; you're always telling me that life is really worth while. Tell me why you think so. What can I get out of it that's likely to change my attitude?"

He smiled mockingly, and Bill Lanteglos, seeing the expression on his face, hesitated a moment before speaking. At last, however, he made up his mind.

"Well," he ventured, finally, "I know it's not a popular subject with you, but you've asked me for my opinion, and as an honest man and your friend I can only mention it. It's at the root of everything. I'm convinced that it could change the world for you. I mean religion, Peter."

Peter laughed contemptuously.

"Religion!" He scoffed. "Bill, you and I went through the war together. Do you mean to tell me

that after that experience you can still hope that a sane man can believe in religion? Half the world at the throats of the other half for more than four years. Religion! A relic of superstition! Fables to comfort old women and scare children into good behaviour!"

"Then you may class me with the old women," broke in Bill, hotly. "I won't try to argue with you. You're in no mood to listen to me on that subject just now. But religion, the religion of Jesus Christ, is just what kept me sane during those years of hell. It answers all your questions, solves all your problems. It is the *only* answer, the *only* solution. Without it the world seems full of cruelties, ironies. With it, one sees a way through to the back of all the difficulties. You used to go to chapel when we were at Winchester. Do you remember the sermon that old chap preached about the *Titanic* disaster? It was a rotten sermon, but there was a text he quoted which has lived with me ever since. 'The Eternal God is my refuge, and underneath are everlasting arms.' You may laugh at me, Peter, but the thought behind those words lies at the heart of everything. It has given me infinite comfort."

Peter stood silent. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

"We won't argue," he said. "I respect your opinions because they're yours, though I must say that it passes my comprehension that a sensible, clear-headed man can still hold them. And now let's change the subject."

Bill leaned forward and helped himself to a cigarette.

"Well," he said, "let's talk about your fortune. How do you intend to spend it? Travel? Lead a gay society life? Keep a racing stable? Gamble at Monte Carlo?"

"Don't be a fool, Bill," laughed his friend bitterly. "I'm not cut out for the 'gay life,' as it's called. I've lost the habit of enjoying myself, to tell the truth." Something less hard, something vaguely pathetic, even, sounded in the last words and in the gruff voice in which they were spoken. It was so terribly true. Peter

Zabuloe had forgotten how to enjoy himself in these long years. "Anyway, those particular forms of idiocy don't appeal to me. Except travelling. You and Marion and I might go off on a trip somewhere together, later on, when I've cleared up a bit of my work. If you can put up with a bad-tempered chap like me. That was rather what I'd intended to talk to you about when I asked you to come out with me this evening. You've seen what an enlivening companion I can be! You complained of it just now. I suppose I really ought not to ask Marion to put up with it for days on end." He shrugged his shoulders. "I told you, my dear chap, this fortune's come too late to be any use to me. I only know how to work. I don't know how to play."

"Rot!" exclaimed the other gruffly, wishing he were so sure in his own mind that it was not all too true. "You may count on Marion and me. We'll jump at your invitation. Where did you intend to go? And when? I'd have to put in for a bit of leave, and I suppose the firm would expect a little notice, but within reason we're ready any time."

"Well," for the first time that evening a real smile broke over Peter's face, a shy, almost embarrassed smile, "I've been thinking of a motoring trip, somewhere on the Continent. I've always wanted a car. I'd pretty nearly saved up enough to buy one, anyway, when this windfall came along, and I've got a whole armful of catalogues in my room. Just a minute. I'd like your advice. At least you've got friends who tell you about their cars. I never speak to a soul if I can help it."

He got up almost eagerly from his deep chair and left the room. Lanteglos, after watching him disappear through the doorway, idly took up the *Journal* and glanced at the back pages. There was for him an eternal fascination in those advertisements of houses to let and to sell. Old and new, beautiful and ugly, there was some interest in each, and it always amused him to

speculate as to how much was true of all that the agents had said about their beauties and perfections. He knew so well what a special art is that of the house-agent who draws up such advertisements.

There was an especially plentiful crop that day. One beautiful example of the Early Georgian style particularly charmed him, but he knew the district in which it stood. It was a survival of more spacious times left standing in suburbia, a painful contrast to its neighbours in more ways than one. His eyes ran down a column of announcements to which no reproductions of photographs were attached. Suddenly a familiar name held his attention. He read on eagerly. His interest was thoroughly aroused. For an instant he let the paper fall, and his glance was lost in space, then he picked the sheet up again, got to his feet, and almost ran out of the room.

"Peter, Peter! Listen to this! Here's the very thing for you!"

"Half a minute. I'm just coming."

Bill came back to his seat, still clutching his newspaper. Again and again he read through the advertisement, impatient for his friend's return.

"Well, what have you found?" asked Peter, rather ungraciously. "I don't want a second-hand car, you know. I want a really good one. I've always had a ridiculous hankering after one of those princely things one sees around in London. I suppose I might have had a second-hand car any time this last year, but—well, I suppose I was a fool, but I'd set my heart on a Bentley. What do you know about them? Look, here's the firm's catalogue . . ."

Bill waved the papers on one side.

"They'll wait, Peter. Listen to this! You must snatch at it at once. They'll make you a car any time, and any good car's only a good car like any other, after all. *This* must be unique! Just you listen!"

"ZABULOE MANOR.

"In the midst of the beauties and grandeur of North Cornwall, an historic Elizabethan manor house, set in its own park lands of nearly one hundred acres, and with three good farms and several cottages attached. Trout stream, good rough shooting, proximity to hunting country. The house contains marvellous panelling, doors and staircases in excellent condition, and the main structure is in excellent repair. Although it has not been brought up to date, Zabuloe Manor could, in the hands of a man of taste and moderate wealth, be made into one of the jewels of England. It has never left the hands of the original family since the day of its construction and has not been added to, or what some would call, improved, but is as it was in the old days, and even in its present condition is perfectly inhabitable, though not fitted with all modern conveniences. It is to be sold by private treaty only, and on certain conditions, through the family lawyers, Messrs Sleeman and Keast, Bodmin."

As he finished reading, Lanteglos sat still and gazed eagerly at his friend without another word. His face was flushed with his enthusiasm, and his eyes alight.

Peter, after a first movement of annoyance at seeing his beloved car catalogues thrust on one side, at the first mention of the name had sat spellbound, drinking in every word. With the sudden silence, however, he seemed to shake himself out of a dream.

"Odd," he said deliberately, coldly. "That's the first time I've run across my name anywhere. I'd rather imagined that I was the only Zabuloe left."

"But, my dear man! This house! It must be the place your family came from. You always said you were originally of Cornish stock. Don't you know anything about your family?"

It was Peter's turn to flush.

"Yes. We came from Cornwall, certainly, but it was generations ago. There was some family quarrel in James the Second's time. Our branch left Cornwall then, and we never went back. I remember my father saying that there were an old couple left, but that the son had been killed in the war, and that the whole family must have died out. He never spoke of any house. These people were far too poor to keep up an Elizabethan Manor House, anyway, from what he said."

"And you've never looked them up?"

"Why should I?"

"Well . . ."

"Have some sense of proportion, Bill. These people were as much strangers to me as any other Tom, Dick or Harry. They were called Zabuloe, perhaps, but, after all, we were all descended from Adam—or a monkey, whichever you happen to believe. Why should I burden myself with more acquaintances? They could be no use to me, nor I to them."

"But this house," insisted Lanteglos, "surely this will alter everything? You can't resist it. Why, you've always been keen on old houses, as keen as Marion or I. Zabuloe Manor! Why, the very name spells romance, even for me, and I'm not a Zabuloe!" He picked up the paper again. "'Marvellous panelling, doors and staircases . . . one of the jewels of England . . . as it was in the old days' . . ."

"Yes. Rats and draughts and damp, all complete! My poor Bill, I should never have thought that you'd have let yourself be run away with by a cleverly drafted advertisement. The place is almost certainly in ruins, and, anyway, can't be more than a neglected farmhouse. It's a long time since I was in Cornwall, not since I was a boy, in fact, but I seem to remember the kind of thing they call a manor house down there. Pigs and chickens and cows all over what used to be the front lawn, and a farmyard complete with all its smells right under the dining-room windows. These lawyers have managed to

catch hold of your imagination, all right, and to kill your critical faculty at the same time. Read it again. 'Although not fitted with modern conveniences' . . . didn't they say? Well, I'm willing to bet there isn't a bathroom or any other form of indoor sanitation in the whole barrack. 'The main structure in excellent repair' . . . Here, give it to me. Yes, that was it. That means that the outer walls aren't yet tumbling down."

Lanteglos gave a gesture of despair.

"Oh, you're hopeless! The whole thing sounds just grand, and all you can find to do is to criticise. I'll give you up. Anyway, it's getting late. Marion must be back from her party by now, and I mustn't keep her waiting."

"And what about that car of mine?" asked the other with a smile.

"Your car'll wait. Though, as a matter of fact, if you're prepared to spend the money, you can't possibly do better than a Bentley. Wonderful cars. Their cabriolet model is very roomy. You'd be able to put Marion and me in front with you, and have all the accommodation you could want for luggage behind. Spacious boot, too. Why don't you ring up young Duncan? Duncan minimus, you know, youngest brother of Tommy Duncan who was at Winchester with us. He's got something to do with Bentley's business. He might get you your car extra quickly, or something. Anyway, he'd give you all sorts of good advice."

"I will. And in the meantime, ask Marion what she thinks of our motor trip, and get some leave fixed up with your firm. About a month from now, I should say, so as to leave me time to buy my car."

"And learn to drive it," suggested Bill Lanteglos with a laugh, getting to his feet. "I'll not trust Marion to you before you've got a certificate of proficiency!"

"Oh, I can drive all right," remarked Peter casually, holding out his friend's coat for him.

The other looked at him in amazement.

"Can you, by Jove?" he asked in obvious surprise. "Well, I thought I knew you, Peter, too. What else have you been hiding about yourself? I've learnt a lot to-night."

"I've been in an expansive mood," answered the other with a grin, which took years off his age, "you do me good, old friend. Mind you let me know what you and Marion can arrange."

He held open the door to his rooms and put a hand on to Bill's shoulder as he passed through.

"Don't let me down, Bill," he said very earnestly, "I count a lot on you and Marion." His hand dropped to take his friend's in his. "Good night."

He shut the door pensively after the figure of his guest had disappeared. A good sort, Bill. If there were more of his kind in the world it might be an easier place to live in. And he was happy enough, too, in spite of always being on the tight side for money. Cheerful beggar, and his wife, too. Exceptions to the general rule. A happy marriage! The word brought back to him memories. Laura Warren! It was true, what he'd said to Bill a little while ago. He'd been hard hit by that girl, with her sunny hair and china-blue eyes, her lilting voice. What had he said? Spring personified! That was Laura, eight years ago. And Laura Felton was a rather dissatisfied, plump, ordinary, slightly common woman . . . or was it a case of sour grapes? He didn't think so. He'd met her without a flutter of the heart which used to miss beats when he saw her in the distance, heard her voice over the telephone, or passed in front of her house! The fools men made of themselves over women!

He threw himself down into his chair again, and refilled his pipe for a last smoke before going to bed.

It would be good fun to take those two off for a real holiday, the first he'd had for years, the best the others would have had since their honeymoon, he'd make it.

A week in England first, and then the Continent, perhaps. Cornwall. Why not spend that first week in Cornwall? Go and see that house? He had been much more intrigued by that advertisement than he had let Bill see. A house with his own name! An old Elizabethan manor house! It was true enough that he had always been fascinated by old houses; they had held for him so much romance. And this one . . .

He picked up the newspaper once more and turned to the back page.

“Zabuloe Manor.”

For a moment or two he read and re-read the announcement, gloating over all the details he had jeered at when his friend had repeated them—panelling, park lands and all the rest. In his mind he could picture just what such a place might be. He let himself ignore all the warnings which his scepticism had suggested so few minutes before, the rats, the damp and the draughts, the absence of bathrooms and indoor sanitation, and only saw granite walls, with ivy, perhaps, or old-fashioned rambler roses climbing over them, a long drive through high avenues of elms, heavy gates, swinging from massive stone posts, with the arms of his family, maybe, graven deep in their surface, but half obliterated by moss or lichen.

The paper fell from his fingers, his pipe went out unheeded, the fire sank into a mere glow of greying coals as he dreamed.

A clock near by struck the hour, midnight! He sprang to his feet and went quickly to a drawer in the sideboard, and in a minute was writing rapidly. Thoughts seemed to come easily, and in a few minutes his letter was finished, closed and stamped. His hat and coat were flung on, anyhow, and he was out of the house, a minute after, striding along on his way to the nearest pillar-box.

And as he undressed to get into bed a little later he felt a different man from the Peter Zabuloe who had

come into his rooms so few hours before. For the first time since Laura Warren had thrown him over for John Felton he had another interest in his life than his eternal grind at work for the mere satisfaction of "getting on."

"Zabuloe Manor."

The mere name spelt enchantment

CHAPTER II

HER HERITAGE

CLOWANCE ZABULOE examined herself in the rather dusty mirror which hung over the fire-place, and decided that she had been fairly successful in her attempt to make herself look older than her years. The dark and rather out-of-date coat and skirt, and the small black hat without a single ornament to lighten its gloom, certainly tended to take away from the girlshness of that slender figure and the oval face, innocent of lines. Her naturally serious expression—less friendly critics might even call it sullen—and her dark hair and eyes were those of a young woman of twenty-five or -six, when seen in that light, in the ill-lit waiting-room of her lawyers' offices. But, in spite of her appearance, her heart, as she sat down again to warm her feet before the inadequate fire, was very much the heart of a schoolgirl waiting for an interview with her head mistress.

What could they want her for ?

Regularly, in the four years since her grandmother's death, either Mr. Sleeman or Mr. Keast had come out to Zabuloe Manor once a quarter, to hand over to her a meagre allowance for her personal needs, to discuss financial details of housekeeping with old Zillah and her husband, to shake a troubled head over the neglected drives, and to go away in an embarrassed silence after shaking hands with her. The routine had never changed.

Why had they sent for her this time to come to them ?

It would not be until next summer that she would attain her majority and take over the responsibility of

her own affairs, as they had so solemnly warned her on her grandmother's death. They had always refused to discuss things with her, to answer her questions, to explain her exact position, giving as their reason that she must wait until that fatal date, July 11th, when, they had hinted, she would wish only too heartily that she had left things in their hands a little longer.

What could have happened to change their plans?

A door opened behind her, and an imposing and opulent person came through, bowed forward by a little dried-up and bald-headed clerk. A swirling wind came in from the street outside as this important client was shown to his car. She had seen it and envied it as she had come in. There was a difference in the manner of the clerk as he came back to speak to her, very faint, but she noticed it.

"Mr. Sleeman and Mr. Keast are free now, Miss Zabuloe, if you'll follow me."

Quite respectful, of course, but she hadn't a big car with a chauffeur waiting outside. That made a great deal of difference.

There was a smell of dust and old ink and paper, the proper smell for a lawyer's office. It permeated the corridor and followed her into the warm and pleasant room where the two old lawyers were standing up to greet her. She felt dreadfully nervous as she went in, but no one would have known that she had the slightest qualm. Her head was held high, in almost an insolent attitude, her face was almost expressionless. It was the two old men who appeared to be nervous and uncomfortable. There was just a little too much *empressement* in their manner, just a shade too much of an impression that they were trying to prepare a conciliatory attitude in their client.

Clowance looked round her, apparently entirely at her ease. Books and files lined the walls. A thick, old-fashioned Turkey carpet covered the floor, a bright red and blue predominating in its colouring, and heavy

curtains in velvet at the windows toned in with it. The two big desks were of dark mahogany, with leather coverings, and the saddleback chairs which stood on either side of the fire-place were upholstered in leather just shabby enough to be comfortable looking. How she wished she might have anything as sumptuous in the library at Zabuloe !

"Well, young lady, you will have been wondering what has made us ask you to come to see us here to-day ! " Mr. Sleeman sat down behind his desk as soon as he had seated his visitor, and he seemed to gain a little assurance from the familiarity of that position. "Mr Keast agreed with me that it would perhaps be easier to talk serious business here than at the Manor. The atmosphere of our own office lends itself more readily. I'm sure you will forgive us for asking you to take this journey."

Clowance looked coldly from one to the other. They were a slightly ridiculous couple. Instead of one being tall and thin, the other small and fat, as in all the traditions, Sleeman was a tiny, little, dried-up wrinkled man, while his partner was about six feet high and enormously fat, and, contrary to all expectation, it was the small man who was the predominating element in the association.

"I'd very much rather you told me at once what it is that you want," said the girl, in a cold, rather sharp tone. She was extremely nervous, and it made her feel gauche and foolish. All that she showed, however, was a somewhat ill-humoured hauteur, which made the two lawyers as nervous as herself. "If there is something disagreeable to tell me, it will be none the better for waiting. I presume it is something important, or you would not have made me come all this way."

"It is," agreed the lawyer, "*most* important. Ah, there is Thomas with our papers. Thank you, Thomas. And now please take away this other file, and see that we are undisturbed until I ring for you." His manner changed entirely as he spoke to his clerk, and then went back to its ingratiating tone as he turned back to the

girl. "A new situation has arisen which, I will tell you quite frankly, I had hoped would not arise while we, my partner and I, were in complete charge of your affairs. As it has arisen, we feel that it is necessary that you should be put in possession of all the facts."

"What is this new situation?" asked Clowance curtly. She was rapidly getting into a state of panic.

"Just a moment, my dear young lady," smiled Mr. Keast, "we will come to that. You must allow us to deal with this matter as we think best. You will understand it all the more clearly if you will allow us to explain a little of the back history of this case. Your grandfather"—he stopped, hesitated, glanced at his partner, and then, receiving a sign to continue, he went on with his story—"your grandfather left the whole of his property to your grandmother, without any limiting conditions whatever. The old lady was very self-willed. She had really been in charge of all the affairs of the estate, even during the life of her husband, and we were very little consulted. Very little consulted, indeed, I may say, and it is a very great pity that this was so. She had been a very good business woman indeed, in her youth. I had, as a young man, the greatest admiration for her ability, but the death of her husband undoubtedly affected her—er—capacities. Your own father, an only son, was a soldier, like so many of his race, but, unlike most of them, he did not leave his profession when he came into the name and title. He was content to leave everything in his mother's hands."

"And the result was deplorable," interpolated Sleeman emphatically, "simply deplorable!"

Clowance realised that her feeling of panic was justified. In her heart she dreaded what must be coming, but sat in stony and miserable silence waiting for these ridiculous old men to tell her in their own good time.

"As you know, your father was killed while you were a mere baby, in the last few months of the Great War." The girl could not forbear a faint quiver of the lips; those

capital letters were so evident, even in the spoken word. "And this new tragedy only tended further to—to disturb old Lady Zabuloe's mental faculties. I do not wish to suggest that your grandmother was in any way—er—unhinged—er—feeble-minded. Merely . . ."

"It is only four years since she died," Clowance coldly reminded them. "I was sixteen. I know perfectly well that she was entirely sane."

"Sane, certainly. Let there be no misunderstanding about that. But—well, less able to look after so large an estate, so big a household, and—we must face facts—with so very little money at her disposal. She called us in to help her, shortly before her death, and we found things in a most unfortunate condition." Mr. Keast looked to his partner for confirmation, received a grunt, and continued. "We took things in hand, and we did our best. Our family has acted for the Zabuloe family ever since the Sleeman who was my grandfather became a family solicitor. We are devoted to the interests of the family, as I can have no need to tell you, and we spared no pains. The task was enormous. There was a great deal of disorder. But we reduced it—that chaos, if I may so express myself, to order. We exchanged a dozen small mortgages for one comprehensive mortgage." Clowance winced at the word. Mortgages had always been synonymous with ruin in her modest vocabulary. "We found new and better tenants for two of the farms. We put some order into the household, reduced the staff, shut up some of the rooms. In fact, we did all that we could with an extremely difficult situation. But your grandmother was very self-willed, very proud, and we could not make her understand that her income no longer allowed her to keep up the manner of life that she had been accustomed to, the manner of life that she considered essential for a Zabuloe. The result, of course, was more debts."

For a moment the two old men stared at the girl until she moved uneasily in her chair.

"There have been none lately," she said at last, almost sullenly.

"No. Oh, no. You have been most reasonable" Clowance smiled faintly. Reasonable! There had been no way to be anything else! "Since Lady Zabuloe's death we have been able to clear off almost the whole of the sum which she left owing. Indeed, I imagine that we shall find ourselves able, at Christmas, to wipe out the remainder of the sum." He fumbled with the file of papers in front of him until Sleeman impatiently took them from him, found the appropriate sheet and held it out to him. "Yes. That is so. All except the mortgage, of course."

"But," interrupted Sleeman, in a much firmer voice, leaning his thin little body over the desk towards her, as if to emphasise his every word, "the mortgage remains, a very heavy mortgage, drawn up at the time when the Manor was in all its glory, when your grandmother kept her full complement of men to look after the grounds, and spent large sums on them. That mortgage still exists, but we feel that the time has come when we must tell you that there is little or no hope that it will be renewed."

Now it had come! Clowance tried to let none of the utter misery which she felt appear in her face, but she was no fool. She could imagine all too well what this was probably going to mean. They were going to ask her to sell one of the farms. Something like that. Sell a Zabuloe farm! She remembered her grandmother's attitude towards neighbours of theirs who had sold one of the family farms, and inwardly she shivered at the prospect of what she knew that stern old lady would have considered as a betrayal of her inheritance.

"I see," she said quietly. "Are you certain of this?"

Sleeman and Keast exchanged glances. Then Sleeman pursed up his narrow lips.

"As near to being certain as I can be. I don't want,

you'll understand, to force the issue. We've been very regular with our payments. There has never been any difficulty in that way—which is, of course, a favourable element in the problem—but we happen to know that the person in whose hands the mortgage lies is in a rather delicate position in the matter of money at the present time. Personally, I have very little doubt that he will refuse to renew. Very little doubt indeed ”

“ And then ? ” Clowance saw the hesitation on the two old faces and rushed on hurriedly—anything from saying what she dreaded to hear. “ Surely there is such a thing as getting someone else to take up a mortgage ? There's no need to let them foreclose, is there ? I don't understand much about these things, but——”

“ My dear young lady, you will pardon my interrupting you, but I think it will be as well to look facts straight in the face at once.” Her heart sank, but she sat quietly there with the colour draining from her face. “ Zabuloe Manor is not a property to appeal to many people in these days. It needs a very great deal of money to keep up such a place. Without money it is a dreary place to inhabit . . . ” He held up his hand in a gesture of warning in face of her swift movement of protest. “ Ah, I know that it is very pleasant to you. It is the home of your childhood, and so on. Yes, yes. That position is a very different one. But for the average purchaser ? It is far from any centre of society. Cornish families are inclined to be exclusive. A stranger is apt to be looked upon as an intruder and given a poor welcome, especially as when they have money—such sums of money as we are contemplating—they are apt to be—well, shall we say that they are apt to be of a different world from their neighbours ? There would be literally nothing here to attract that type of person to purchase Zabuloe Manor. It cannot in any way be considered as an investment. The three farms are rather poor farms, as such things go. There is only a bare living to be made out of them. No. The chances of finding someone else

who would be prepared to invest the necessary sums in a new mortgage are few. Besides . . .”

There was an ominous pause. Clowance looked from one to the other with wide eyes. What was coming now?

Sleeman cleared his throat noisily.

“There is another point I must explain to you now. It will, I fear, be very displeasing to you, but I’m afraid that I can do nothing. The matter is out of our hands entirely. It is about your grandmother’s will.”

“Granny’s will?” The girl looked in astonishment at the speaker. “But she left everything to me, didn’t she?”

“In a way, yes.” Sleeman shuffled uncomfortably in his chair. “It hadn’t seemed likely that the occasion would arise to talk to you about this. It appeared so very unlikely that such a situation would ever arise. Well, well! I must be brief. There is nothing to be gained by putting matters off any longer. The facts are these. By your grandmother’s will the whole of the family property was to become yours on your majority.”

“But that will be next summer! I don’t understand!”

“I know. I know. It is very difficult. Believe me, my dear young lady, I feel the difficulty of the position almost as much as you can do. The fact remains that the property is—or rather *was*—to have become yours on July 11th of the coming year, but in the meantime, from the moment of the death of your grandmother until your majority, it was to be administered by my partner and myself, and—this is what is going to cause you pain, I fear—it was to be advertised for sale, three times a year, in a good paper.”

“For sale? Zabuloe? Not the *house*, Mr. Sleeman?”

“The whole property, Miss Clowance. Oh, I know how you must feel!” He had seen the utter distress in the girl’s white face, the tears standing in her eyes, her lips quivering in her effort to control herself. “Believe me, it was very—er—distasteful to us. We had had no idea of any such thing. We were not consulted in

the matter. Lady Zabuloe made her own will, a holograph will, in perfectly regular form. But we said nothing to you at the time, for we were convinced that no buyer would come forward. This is a bad time for selling houses, and the position of the Manor, although attractive to you—and to us—would not be likely to appeal to many people. Too remote. No. We did not foresee any offers, and so we simply did not mention the matter to you. It seemed unnecessary to pain you with the idea, when there was so very little fear of its ever going any further."

"But Granny! How *could* she?"

"You must not be unjust, my dear." Sleeman had taken a much softer tone. He was genuinely distressed at what he was having to do, and the girl's grief had so changed her from the cold, almost insolent young woman with whom he had been accustomed to deal, that he found himself utterly disarmed. "You must not blame her too much. She clearly felt the danger that the mortgage might not be renewed. She knew of all the debts she was leaving behind her. She knew how almost impossible it would be for a young girl to keep up the old place, even to live in it at all, with the inheritance she was leaving you. Nothing but debts, my dear! It has only been by the severest stewardship, by denying you any luxuries, almost necessities, indeed, that we have been able to pay them off. And you see, as things are turning out, there is every fear that the mortgage will not be renewed, that we shall find no one else ready to take it up, and that would mean the realisation of the property in any case. This offer——"

"Then someone *does* want to buy it?" A gleam of hope seemed to flash into the girl's eyes. "Then——"

Sleeman shook his head, sadly discouraging.

"To *buy* it. That is a different question. To buy it in order to inhabit it. Not to take out a mortgage on it so that *you* may continue to live in it"

"But tell me, Mr. Sleeman," pleaded the girl, "if we

were to"—she hesitated for a second, and then went on, wrenching the unwelcome suggestion from her lips—"if we were to sell one of the farms, couldn't we satisfy this person who holds the mortgage and persuade him to give us some more time? Now that there are no more debts to pay off we could put a little more money on one side each year to pay off some more of the mortgage . . ."

Once again, inexorably, the thin head shook.

"I am afraid not. The matter has now gone too far. You see, the will is quite definite. We are to sell if a buyer can be found. There is no choice left to us. If a buyer can be found who is prepared to pay the price set upon the property by your grandmother, we have no choice at all. We must sell. The price is high. Quite ridiculously high, in our opinion. That is the one element which is favourable—if you can call it favourable." He gave a wry little smile. "I will admit that I had been prepared to make the very suggestion that you yourself have put forward. Old Mr. Nancecullom has more than once thrown out hints that he was prepared to buy Trewint Farm if you should be willing, when the time came. I had hoped that we might perhaps stave off the evil day with that, and, as you say, with our debts paid off, if you had been willing to go through more years of—er—poverty, we might have paid off our mortgage, slowly, very slowly. But now, as I say, the matter is out of our hands."

"But Granny . . ." The note of panic had grown, and her voice was pitched unnaturally high. "I can't believe it! She always told me it would be a real *sin* to sell an inch of Zabuloe! How *could* she! How *could* she!"

"My dear, she was leaving you practically a pauper! She was trying to act for the best." Sleeman got up from his desk and went over to the girl, who was now bending over the side of her big chair shaken with deep sobs which she could no longer control. "And we must not lose hope," he said, putting his hand awkwardly

on her shoulder. "This buyer may be discouraged by the price. We are bound by the price, you know, and it is a very high one."

"And there is another point," added Keast, eager to add his word of encouragement; "one of the farms is to be kept out for you. You are to keep one of the farms to live in. Trewint is excluded from the sale. It was to be Trewint, I think?"

"Yes, yes," agreed Sleeman gruffly. He was an understanding old man, and realised the tactlessness of his partner. He knew well enough that the girl would probably not be able to bear the thought of living near Zabuloe, once some stranger was installed in her old home. "And there was one more queer clause. I don't know what it might be worth. Little, I fear, but it is to be a condition of the sale, and it might easily deter a possible buyer. It is to be a condition of the sale that, should you, at any time within ten years of the sale, be in a position to buy back the property at the price of the purchase, plus the actual sums spent on it by the purchaser in restoring the structure and such *permanent* repairs and improvements, you are to have the *right* to do so. The purchaser will be *obliged* to sell it back to you." He shrugged his shoulders. "Except as a deterrent to the possible purchaser I fear that the clause may be considered as useless. But there it is."

Clowance raised a tear-stained face. Her blue eyes, like dark pools, were still swimming in tears.

"Then there is still a chance?" she said softly.

"Don't build on it, my dear. Still, this application for information about Zabuloe Manor has not yet come to the stage of an actual offer. This person has seen our advertisement—it was your grandmother who drew it up, and I must say that I am very surprised that it should have drawn any reply—has written for further particulars, and this morning we have his letter asking us definitely for the price. I had said nothing about that so far." The old man smiled a little apologetically at

the girl. "I fear I did not try to attract this buyer. I pointed out all the disadvantages of the place. He must have thought that I had a strange way of looking after the interests of my client." He met Clowance's grateful glance with a warmer smile. "But he has persisted. We'll see how he reacts to the figure I shall mention in my letter this evening"

The girl looked questioningly up at him.

"You *must* answer?" she suggested tentatively.

"I'm afraid so. Now, just one moment." He scribbled a line hastily on a sheet of paper, and pressed a button on his desk. "Ah, Thomas," he said, as the clerk appeared, "I wish you would bring us some tea, and I shall be obliged if you would just see to this for me." He handed the sheet of paper to the man, and then turned back to Clowance. "You must try not to let this matter worry you too much, my dear," he said kindly. "After all, nothing is settled yet. Our price may well discourage this person, and when we've tried him with the price, if he still persists, I'll try him with this peculiar special condition. I shall make the most of it, you may be sure. We may manage to get rid of him yet."

"You are very good and understanding," said Clowance, smiling rather waveringly at him. "I do appreciate all you are doing."

"I know what you feel, my dear. But, though I should have liked to have spared you, I felt that I must let you know all this. I didn't want it all to come to you as too much of a shock. For you see"—he hesitated once more and met her startled eyes with an apologetic look—"I shall have to send this person an order to view the property if he asks for it. And I'm afraid it is very probable that he will. After all, he has now asked to know the price, in spite of my hints that it might not suit him, and he will want to see how the price and the value compare." He raised his hands in an odd little gesture. "We shall see. But I felt we could only warn you."

And now for a cup of tea." Thomas had appeared with an unexpectedly appetising-looking tray, set with a heavy old Georgian silver tea-set and thin old Lowestoft china. "My dear wife always used to say that there was nothing so exhausting as emotion, and nothing so refreshing as a cup of tea after an emotion. Will you honour us by pouring out, my dear?"

It was half an hour later, when Thomas had shown Clowance out of the office and into the old lawyer's own car, which he had had sent round to take her back to her home, realising how deeply the girl had been affected by her interview, that the two partners sat facing one another across their neat desks.

"Well, I'm glad it's finished, Simon." The old man shook his head solemnly. "I fear it will be a dreadful thing for that poor child if this thing goes forward."

"And it will," added the other shrewdly. "That man means business. He's keen. He won't be put off by the price, either. I didn't show you that letter I had this afternoon from those lawyers he referred us to. He's a wealthy man. Quite recently come into a fortune. And he has no other house of his own. That's a point."

"I do believe"—Sleeman viewed his partner with an astonishment that was not untouched with a certain distaste—"that you want this sale to go through!"

"It would be a fine piece of business," answered the other, almost defiantly, "and a very good thing for our client."

"Good thing—good thing," put in the other gruffly; "it all depends on how one looks at these things. I always said you had no soul, Keast. Now I'm sure of it."

"But you don't understand," protested the fat man plaintively. "I've been thinking that it ought to make quite a romance. A Zabuloe! He's certain to fall in love with Miss Clowance. She'll accept him, and live on in her old home with all his wealth to put it in order, and run it as it should be run. It will be like old times!"

"H'm!" This time the distaste was unmistakable.

"I sometimes wonder whether it is really possible that we can have had a common grandfather? Set yourself up as a psychologist!" He pressed the button of the bell on his desk and waited in grim silence for his clerk to appear. "Ah, Thomas, just take down a letter to this Mr. Peter Zabuloe, will you? It must go off by the evening mail."

CHAPTER III

INTO THE WEST

It was three weeks after the evening spent in Peter's rooms that he rang up Bill Lanteglos at his office. Those three weeks had made an enormous difference to Peter. The letter he had written that night to the lawyers in Bodmin had been an oddly impulsive action for him. He was accustomed to think out everything he did with a deliberation which was an asset to a man of his profession, but unnatural in one of his years. As he had often explained to Lanteglos, he was a poor man, and as a barrister he had been led to see too often to what straits a man can be brought through an ill-considered action, and had taken the habit of thinking out his own from every angle before committing himself.

It had, perhaps, been the slightly heady effect of his legacy, he told himself, that had made him allow himself to give way so easily to that overwhelming desire to know more of Zabuloe Manor. Twelve thousand a year was a sum which could justify a little laxity in those fixed rules of his. Not much harm could be done by a mere inquiry into the whereabouts, the size and the purchase price of the advertised gem. But the answer which had come from Bodmin had only served to whet his curiosity—and his desire to see this house. Sleeman and Keast had been oddly reluctant to give him details. Their reply had been vague and discouraging, and he had thought it queer that the firm which had taken such pains to make their advertisement so alluring should appear so unwilling that a prospective buyer should go further with a deal.

Indeed, had not the very reticence of the lawyers, by a spirit of contradiction characteristic of the man, made him the more obstinately determined to get to the bottom of the mystery? Had he been the ordinary casual inquirer, in fact, he would certainly have let the matter stand without further bothering his head about it.

Sleeman and Keast had told him that the manor house lay far from any centre of society, deep in the country—but did not say just where it did lie, they told him that it had long been neglected, owing to the poverty of the owners; they mentioned once more that the main structure was in good repair, but emphasised the fact that there was no central heating, electric light or gas laid on. They stated, as if it were a positive warning, that the price of the property had been laid down by the will of the last owner, and could not be modified until the majority of the heir to the estate; they hinted that the price was, in their opinion, perhaps a high one, in spite of the historic interest and undoubted value of the Manor. They told him vaguely that there would be special and somewhat unusual conditions attaching to any sale which might eventually be arranged, but did not give him the least idea as to what might be the nature of those conditions.

Altogether, Peter decided, it had been a most peculiar letter, evidently intended to "put him off". But it only made him all the more keen, and another letter went on its way to Bodmin on the very same evening, demanding specific details in no uncertain terms. This time there could be no more hedging. And Peter grinned to himself, feeling younger and more interested in life than he had since the death of his father.

He had not forgotten the car. Duncan minimus had proved helpful. By a piece of good fortune a car ordered for a rich Continental client had been thrown back on to the hands of the firm, owing to a bank failure in Switzerland. It just happened to be a cabriolet model, and though Peter did not much care for the bright green

paint and aluminium bonnet, he was easily persuaded that these defects could quickly be overcome. He bought that car almost "over the counter," as he told himself with a smile, and rushed through his work each day so as to take her out for evening runs around London. The engine, by a further stroke of luck, had already been "run in." The gentleman with a taste for violent green and aluminium had also had a passion for speed which would not brook the initial stage through which every owner of a new car has to go, and he had paid a large additional sum to have that tedious process carried out for him by the firm. Peter was able to run the beautiful engine to the full extent of its powers, without fear of injuring its mechanism, and the years seemed to drop from his shoulders in the rush of the wind.

His very voice was different. Bill Lanteglos hardly recognised, in the vital, eager tones, the usual cold and disillusioned voice of his friend.

"That you, Bill?"

"Yes. Who is it?"

"Peter."

Bill's brow twisted into a grimace of surprise, and his voice echoed it over the telephone, vaguely incredulous.

"Peter? Why . . ."

"Yes. Look here, Bill, do you think you could get away for, say, five days? This isn't the big holiday I promised you. It's just a little surprise trip. England, this time. But I've got my new Bentley, and she's such a beauty that I want to give her a real run, not just the couple of hours in the evening which is all I've had so far. What do you say? Can it be managed?"

"Well," hesitated his friend, "I'd promised Marion . . ."

"Oh, Marion's included in the invitation, you hopeless old Benedict!" Peter laughed light-heartedly. "I want both of you."

"When do you expect us to start, and where are we going?" Bill was swept off his feet by this new Peter, the old Peter, really, the Peter of before the war.

"When? To-morrow morning, first thing. Where? That's another matter. You'll see. Can you come, though? That's the main thing, because I really think that if you can't I'll simply start right away without you!"

"Oh, no, you don't. Can you wait half an hour for your answer? I must ring up Marion, and ask the Chief if I can be spared. Where are you?"

"In my chambers. I'll wait half an hour. No more!"

And Bill, scratching his head in puzzlement, went off to make his arrangements.

Peter fetched his friends from their little suburban home early the next morning. It did him good to see the enthusiasm on Bill's round, cheerful face, and the content in the soft grey eyes of Marion Lanteglos. As he watched her help her husband to pack in their suitcases beside his own in the capacious boot of the car, and saw old Bill's solicitude as he tucked his wife into place in the wide front seat, he could not help reflecting that there might be points in marriage after all. He had led a terribly lonely life, especially after that brief, but disastrous, episode with Laura Warren, when, having once broken down for her sake his wall of reserve, he had built up the breach yet more firmly, and added a few more feet to the barrier between himself and the outside world. It was not often that he saw his friend with his wife. It was understood between them that he did not much care for the society of women, and he and Bill saw each other more usually when Marion was engaged elsewhere. On the rare occasions when they were together, Peter increased his liking and respect for the quiet woman with the delicious sense of humour, the unobtrusive competence, admired her faultless taste, as much shown in the decoration of their little house as in the dressing of her own neat figure and auburn-crowned head. Marion, he admitted, was an exception to his rule about women.

And even then Marion Lanteglos was his idea of a

friend. But she could never have made his blood flow faster.

It was the first time since Bill's marriage that the two friends had taken a holiday together, and Peter found himself liking the companionship of these two united people more than he could have believed possible. He had rather dreaded the necessity to include Marion in his invitation, but with every hour on their enchanted journey he congratulated himself more on his decision. The old story about certain women being capable of being "sisters" to a man was being proved true. Had he ever possessed a sister he could not have wished for one more delightful than his friend's wife. She was gay when it was wanted, quiet when that mood fitted best with his, she made no fuss at hotels, knew what she wanted to eat and drink without a lot of tiresome hesitation, was easily satisfied with any pace he liked to choose along the fine roads which led them towards the West, never seemed tired, and did not expect him to fall into raptures about the scenery.

Not that it was not worth a little rapture.

It was one of those late autumns which sometimes bless England, and October had not stripped the trees of their leaves. It was now the beginning of November, a crisp, brilliant day, with one of those pale blue, cloudless skies which come with sunshine and frost. They were rushing through Dorsetshire along a road bordered with trees, a little beech wood, copper-coloured above and below, for some leaves still clung to the branches, while a carpet of brown rustled under the feet of some children who were running about with their dog, a golden cocker.

"You're a satisfactory companion, Marion," Peter smiled at her. "A restful person. Most of the women I have ever had to do with would have gushed about that scene under those trees, and expected me to gush back."

He had drawn the car to a halt, and for a moment or

two they were watching the children's game, as the afternoon sunshine glinted down upon them

Marion smiled back at him, a bewitching smile with a hint of mockery in it.

"Poor Peter! You've been unfortunate, that's all. There are a lot of women who don't gush, you know. Personally, I've always enjoyed my views best in silence, but I can understand that other people may like to be articulate. The great thing is to feel what is likely to appeal to those who are with you and endeavour not to get on their nerves. And your skin, my friend, is so particularly thin!"

"Is it?" Peter flushed, and only just caught himself in time. He had been within an ace of taking offence. He looked at Marion's calm face out of the corner of his eye. Was she right?

"A hot-house plant, old son," put in Bill with a laugh. "Too much solitude. Well, this will make a good beginning. Fortunes seem to suit you."

All through that day Peter learned things about himself, and things which did not too well please him. He was never criticised by his friends, never made to feel that he was anything but the perfect host, but they were such more than perfect guests that it began to dawn on him that his attitude towards everything was built up on the assumption that he, and he alone, counted.

And it was from no ethical motive that he began to feel that this must be changed, at least as far as the Lanteglos were concerned, but merely because of an uncomfortable feeling of inferiority in comparison with their charming way of putting him first in every way and accepting his preferences so naturally and without question. It was a most uncomfortable experience to realise that he was not satisfied that this should be so.

To begin with, Bill had been eager to know their destination. He had frankly asked to be told where they were going, but Peter had laughingly told them that he wanted to keep that detail to himself, and asked them

to leave themselves in his hands. They had seemed delighted to do so. Not knowing anything more than their general direction, they could offer no opinion on the choice of a luncheon halt. There again he must decide. Peter himself was never accustomed to take tea in the afternoon, and only realised late in the afternoon that Marion, as a woman, would almost certainly have welcomed a halt about four or half-past. Neither she nor her husband hunted at such a thing, and it was not until they ran across another motoring party with a picnic outfit spread out by the roadside that the idea occurred to their host. When it did, however, he had frankly to admit to himself that, had he wanted tea he would not have hesitated to mention it. And he wondered afresh at this contrast between himself and his friends.

It was a wonderful run. The light fell early, and as they drove into Exeter the street lamps were just being turned on.

"How about this for a halt?" suggested Peter. "Do you know the old city, Marion?"

She shook her head.

"I've never been in the West before," she assured him. "Do you want to stop? It isn't because you're afraid of tiring me?"

"Oh, no," admitted Peter frankly. "I hate driving for long in the dark. The lights of other cars dazzle me, and I tire rather quickly then, and my nerves get ragged. Perhaps to that extent I was thinking of you. I'm a shocking companion after I've driven too long with headlights on."

"I'm all for stopping here, then," assented Bill emphatically. "Peter in a bad temper, my dear, isn't fit to live with, believe me!"

Marion glanced at her host.

"I can well believe it," she said lightly. "Exeter let it be, by all means."

And once more Peter only just caught himself in time. Could it be true that he had become a "sensitive plant"?

There was a most comfortable old hotel in the Cathedral yard. It had been modernised in the right way, but it still kept the atmosphere of leisure, dignity and repose which is usually lacking in the modern hotel. There were beautiful old rooms, which still held much of the old furniture which belonged to their period, and what had been added had not been allowed to bring in too modern a note, to catch the eye unpleasantly.

Marion smiled gratefully when Peter assured her that she could take all the time she wanted before dinner. He ordered for his friends a large double room with a private bathroom, a single room for himself, and then left them while he went to attend to the needs of his beloved car. He found the garage, gave instructions for the coachwork to be cleaned and a little necessary greasing to be done—he had very carefully gone into an elaborate chart which had been supplied to him by the makers and explained at length by the helpful Duncan minimus—and then made his way up to his room at the hotel.

He revelled in this new and delicious feeling of owning the world, as he put it to himself. All his life he had had to be careful. Even during his boyhood he had known that his allowance at Winchester, for example, was the limit of what he must spend, and not too liberal a limit at that. His father had never been a wealthy man. He had sent his son to the best school in the country, in his opinion, and had given him enough money to hold his own reasonably with his fellows. There could never be any idea of extravagance. The family finances would not have run to it, even if his father's ideas would have approved of it, which they most emphatically did not. During the war his brief periods of leave had been the only times of lavish expenditure that he had ever known, and then the knowledge that they must quickly end in a return to hell let loose had taken from them the care-free atmosphere which would have made them really perfect.

Now all was different. An income larger than he had ever dreamed of and backed by a capital adequate to

secure that income for the rest of his life was giving him a new and delightful outlook on things. It was extremely pleasant to be staying in the best hotel that Exeter could boast, to have engaged the most comfortable rooms in it for himself and his friends, to know that the car he had left in the garage was perhaps the most luxurious to be found in the whole city. His clothes were just the right clothes. He had ordered himself an entirely new outfit since he had come into his inheritance, new down to the very socks and studs, the brushes and razor. Only his bags and suit-cases remained. He had always possessed a good leather travelling outfit, for his father had been a great believer in "good luggage," even for his schoolboy son. Looking down at it as it stood neatly arranged in a corner of his hotel bedroom, Peter smiled, thinking that it alone remained to show that he was not what is normally considered as a *nouveau riche*, in which class the paint-work and bonnet of his car might have tended to place him.

He had felt a mellowed spirit coming over him ever since the evening when he had sent off that first letter to the Bodmin lawyer. The knowledge that he was in a position to make inquiries about valuable property had sent the first glow through him. This journey was intensifying the feeling.

He was in a high good humour when he arrived in the beautiful old lounge where his guests awaited him. He had ordered sherries on his way through the hall, for it was not yet the official hour for dinner, and as they sat and sipped the smooth amber wine he felt at peace with all the world in a way which he believed that he had never known.

Bill eyed his friend with an amused hint of an smile.

"It seems to me, as I told you this afternoon," he said chaffingly, as they took their places in the half-empty dining-room a few minutes later, "that inheriting fortunes agrees with you, my friend. You're hardly recognisable."

"Well, it's hardly surprising, is it?" replied Peter

slowly. "I've been thinking about it these last days. There isn't a doubt that money does make a tremendous difference to one's outlook on life. There's a freedom in ample wealth that isn't attainable in any other way."

"Never having experienced it, I can't argue," his friend grinned back at him. "I've always heard that wealth brought worries and responsibilities, but it's early days for you to know anything about that."

"No. You don't see what I mean, Bill," insisted the other. "Your poor man is so vulnerable. He's never safe. He's always on the defensive. Life can get at him in so many ways. There are so many things he can't do. I don't mean the journeys he can't afford to take, the things he can't afford to buy. It goes far deeper than that. His job may depend on his not expressing his opinions too freely. He can't afford to pick and choose what he'll take by way of a job, even. He may have to meet and be civil to people he doesn't care for. If he happens to be married all this is exaggerated a hundred times. I tell you, even these few weeks since I've been included in the happy category of the well-to-do, I've found that my whole outlook has changed. I've no temptation to be morose, bitter, gloomy, as I know I was becoming before. I feel as if I'd been let out of prison, somehow. My attitude to my clients has been different. It's extraordinary, you know, but although they couldn't have known that I'd come into money, something changed in *me* has altered their attitude towards me. There must have been a difference in my manner. More independent, or something of that sort. There was one old chap who used to rile me almost beyond bearing. I've had to be careful because it was a fat case and I didn't want to lose it by putting his back up. Since I heard of my good fortune, unconsciously I've felt, I suppose, that it would matter less if I did lose the old chap's custom, but anyhow I must have treated him differently. He's been far more reasonable. It's been the same all along the line. It's only logical, after all."

Marion had sat in silence listening to the two men with evident interest. Now she looked up at Peter with a faint smile.

"In one way you're quite right," she admitted, "but not altogether. Nothing of that sort is absolute. It is all relative and depends on the point of view. The poor man has the same freedom if he has an entirely independent spirit. I'll admit that that degree of independence of spirit is extremely rare. There are very few people who are truly and unaffectedly 'above' money, as it is sometimes put. There are very few who are able to count their independence of spirit above their creature comforts. I admit that I can't reach those heights myself. Nor Bill. We both rather give in to our liking for a comfortable house and a small garden, the right kind of clothes and an occasional good holiday. So Bill goes on drawing plans of the insides of office buildings, as he so often complains, when he'd far rather build really lovely modern versions of the late Queen Anne or early Georgian house, or restore the glories of some Tudor mansion and fit it with modern conveniences without spoiling its original charm and style. But all that's because we haven't really strong characters."

Peter laughed rather shortly.

"I've heard that theory argued before," he said a little scornfully, "and frankly I consider it as entirely academic."

"But I assure you that such truly independent characters do exist. I have a friend—he's Bill's friend really—who really does care nothing at all for the creature comforts if they interfere with his complete liberty of spirit. He wasn't brought up a crank, either. He's a younger son of a very old family and he's been through the usual public school and university training. I admit that he was always rather a square peg in a round hole. He was good at all sorts of games, and that saved him both at school and at the university. Otherwise I imagine he'd have had a rather bad time. His father died leaving

the family affairs in an awful mess. The elder brother is living the most miserable existence trying to put things straight again. He literally has hardly enough to eat, himself, and can't marry because he simply can't afford to risk having children yet. So the younger brother simply had to take it for granted that there was nothing for him but to earn his living. He went to a neighbouring estate as agent. He soon left because the owners wouldn't do what he considered as the right thing by their tenants in the way of repairs. It was the same at the next place. Then he got a job as secretary to a politician, one of the new sort. He was expected to drag in his friends to meet the man. That wouldn't do for him. He wouldn't 'sell his friends,' as he put it, and as he told his employer in so many words . . . so that was the end of that post. Then he got a job as schoolmaster in a preparatory school on the strength of his games record. He left there because he wouldn't favouritise the son of an extremely wealthy profiteer. It was a new school and couldn't afford to lose this child, as he was likely to bring a host of others of the same kind of origin. So our young friend had to go."

Peter shrugged his shoulders.

"And what has he found to do, may one ask? It must have been rather a difficult task to find something to meet his requirements."

"Oh, he's got a job as chauffeur to a pal of his. He's treated just like any other chauffeur, but at least he's independent, so he says." Bill grinned. "I admit he's a bit of a special case. But it isn't that he doesn't like a good time, good clothes, decent food and all the rest of it. It's just that he values his independence more. He's a jolly fine chap, too, though I know he sounds a bit queer from all this. It's all in your sense of values."

"I can't say I'm convinced," insisted Peter obstinately. "Your argument isn't even logical. Give your young and idealistic friend a wife—I don't even insist on a family!—and where is he? He can't give up good jobs right and left, on the flimsiest provocation. And then, in

any case, you've given the whole of your argument away by telling me about the elder brother. The poor chap can't even think of marrying because he's got no money! What more perfect answer do you want to your own contention? And then take yourselves. I can't admit, Marion, that you and Bill are weak characters. It isn't a question of principles with you. It's a mere matter of preferences. You're hampered by your lack of independent means. Just what I'm trying to prove to you."

Marion laughed good-humouredly.

"I'm afraid I'm not convinced, either. And it isn't the fault of your arguments. I'm completely overwhelmed by them for the moment, and I'll admit that I feel as if I hadn't a leg to stand on. And yet *I know* that there's a flaw somewhere. I'll think it over, Peter, and we'll open the discussion again some day."

"It's no good, old lady. You're up against one of the coming shining lights of the Bar. Better give it up. I'm no more convinced than you are, but I know when I'm beaten."

Bill made a grimace of mock despair.

"Well, shall we say that it's far *simpler* when one has money?" Peter suggested amiably enough. It was hard to be irritated with Bill, and the food and wine which were being served to them tended to put a man at peace with all the world. "I've never been one of these high-minded independent souls myself. I was determined to get on, and prepared to make the necessary—shall we call them concessions?—in order to do it. And I must say that I appreciate this glorious feeling that concessions are henceforward things of the past."

Once more Marion smiled.

"Don't be too certain of that," she said quietly. "But what are you going to do now? Of course for the moment this new freedom will be a sufficient interest in itself. But afterwards? Shall you continue at the Bar? Bill tells me that you've just got into the real swim."

Peter hesitated. Did he yet know himself what he intended to do? So much depended on this journey. And he didn't want to speak of that just now

"I can't frankly say that I know, yet," he admitted. "It's all rather new. I shan't give up at once, anyway. This is only a short holiday. I've two or three cases waiting for me in town. But afterwards? Well, I'm waiting to see how I feel."

"I see. Like Bill, I can't speak from personal experience, but from all I can learn from fortunate friends, being rich isn't very satisfactory as an occupation, without something else to supplement it as an interest."

"Quite apart from anything else," added Bill, ingenuously earnest, "it's such a selfish existence. I can't believe that anyone's ever really happy who's only got himself to think about."

Marion smiled tenderly on her husband, with a hint of gentle mockery in her smile, but her eyes soon sought her host's face. A mockery less kindly was to be read there, and a trace of the hardness of expression which had left those handsome features during this enchanted day.

"Spare us a sermon, old chap," he said, a little wearily. "I know you think I'm more or less of a lost soul."

"It isn't that, Peter," protested Bill. "I don't want to bother you with your soul. But I do want you to be a bit happier a man than you have been these last years. You've grown harder and more bitter each year. You've had no interest in life but your eternal career. It's no good your thinking that just because you've got money now you'll suddenly become happy and contented. You won't. If you go on with your work at the Bar you'll spend your time wondering how much of your success is due to your own merits and how much to your money. No one can be happy who's got no one but himself to think about. Pure selfishness doesn't lead to happiness. If you'd even got a wife to care about . . ."

Peter held up a hand.

"That subject's barred," he said, quickly.

"And, anyway," put in Marion, "I don't think that would be much of a help. A happily married couple tend to become wrapped up in themselves. It's only a slightly wider form of selfishness."

"Well, after all, can you produce any convincing reason why one shouldn't be selfish?" Peter looked challengingly at his friends. "Why should I care for anyone but myself? What do I owe to the rest of the world?"

"Why are you giving us this marvellous holiday, if you're so bent on that theory," asked Bill, grinning.

"My dear old chap, I have no illusions at all about that. It's just what Marion would call a slightly wider form of selfishness. I'm not putting myself out in any way and I'm giving myself pleasure. I know that if I had servants I should be good to them, as it is put, but that would be because I like to have cheerful and contented people around me. It creates a pleasant atmosphere which would react on myself. I shouldn't be thinking about them for themselves, but for their effect on me. It's all perfectly logical."

Bill Lanteglos gave a gesture of despair.

"An utterly hopeless case. There's no arguing with him," he said with an enormous sigh. "Let's change the subject for this evening."

"Very well," his wife admitted, "so long as it is firmly understood that we don't subscribe to those opinions and that we're allowed another innings. I've a few things to say in favour of my views, but I'm far too sleepy to-night to hold my own." She smiled at her host. "And at what time would you like us to be ready to-morrow morning?"

A look of eagerness came into Peter's face. The lines cleared away.

"Would eight o'clock breakfast be too early?" he asked. "We've a big day in front of us."

Bill raised his eyebrows.

"A big day? With your car? Why, I looked at the map before dinner, and we're only about a hundred or so miles from the end of the country!"

"Yes, but we're not going to the end of the country," was the reply, but nothing more could be got from the host as to their destination, in spite of Bill's persistent questions

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST ENCOUNTER

THEY left the main roads only after lunch next day. On leaving Exeter in the morning, Peter had decided to take his friends over the moors, by the less usual road via Tavistock, rather than the one which skirts the edge of Dartmoor, by Okehampton. It was another brilliant autumn day, and the drive was most impressive. The moorland air put them all into the highest spirits, and Peter felt a real zest in life. It was good to be free, it was good to be able to give this joy to his friends. Life was not perhaps such a poor business as he had always thought. After the lean years were commencing the fat ones. The contrast was making this new aspect of existence all the more enjoyable.

Tavistock almost tempted them to stop, but it was really too early for lunch, and Peter, although he was unwilling to show it to Bill, was eager to get on his way. Two or three stops on the top of Dartmoor had put them a little behindhand on his plans, and he stuck to his original idea of lunching at Liskeard.

The crossing of the river which divides the two counties had given Lanteglos another opportunity for chaffing his friend. Peter put up with it with a fairly good grace, but it went too near to the quick to be really welcome. He was feeling a queer reluctance to listening to Bill's idle jokes. Something in this country-side appealed to him in a strange and unprecedented way. He belonged to this county.

The long valley from Liskeard to Bodmin is one of the

loveliest in the West. Without a word, Peter had instinctively slowed down. The great car glided along as easily at twenty miles an hour as it had climbed the tremendous slopes of Dartmoor at fifty and sixty, and as smoothly. He caught a grateful smile from Marion, and a satisfied sigh from Bill. No one could remain unmoved by such scenery.

But when they turned off into a by-road something seemed to tell his guests that they were nearing the end of the journey. Half unconsciously they shifted in their seats, sat up a little, paid more attention to their surroundings. Even had inclination not pointed that way, nor common sense prompted him, Peter would have been obliged to drive slowly now. High banks, topped with bushes, brambles, gorse, edged the road on both sides, often fully ten feet high and more, and the road itself was what he afterwards was to hear described by the village folk as "crooked as a dog's hind leg." Never for more than twenty yards did it run straight, and its twists and turns were so sharp that it was impossible to know what danger might be waiting round the corner. More than once he had to draw into a field gateway to allow a farm cart to pass, and once he had to back almost a quarter of a mile to find such a gate. On any other day, in any other place, all this would have annoyed him past bearing. He had seen Bill's eyes on him in apprehension as the first obstacles had appeared. He had noticed the surprise in them as he had taken it all so good-humouredly. He recognised himself how astonishing it was. But something in this county was mellowing him. It was impossible to ruffle his new-found amiability.

The villages delighted them all. There was a neatness, a well-being about them which appealed to them. Marion remarked on the absence of any sign of poverty. The children were all dressed in good warm clothes, there were no slovenly women in the doorways of the cottages. Everyone seemed in good humour. Peter's frequent

requests for information about his route were gladly met. People went out of their way to show him the right turning to take, and yet there was no sign of subservience among them, but an independence of spirit and an all-embracing friendliness which seemed to welcome them.

Peter found himself glowing with a sort of late-found patriotism for his county. In earlier days it had never occurred to him to think of himself as particularly a Cornishman. He was British. That had been enough. But with every mile he was more glad that this lovely, homely, pleasant county was his own. His people had come from here. He was coming home.

"Es et Clowance you want, then, me dear?" asked one old woman in reply to his usual request for directions. He had soon found that his maps were of little use to him while he was driving, and he was determined not to give away his secret to Bill or Marion before he must, and so he could not hand over the maps to them and let them puzzle the way out for him. "Aw, ted'n fur f'um 'ere. 'Twill be 'baout fower mile. Raound by church gaate, then shaarp left, an' straaight on. Caan't miss et ef you do go es I tell'ee."

Peter thanked her with a smile and followed her directions. The road ran along the banks of a stream on the far side of which lay wide meadows where a few cattle were grazing. He let the car run at hardly more than walking pace while he studied the landscape. Beyond the fields were trees, rising up the flank of a low hill, standing together so closely that even in this comparatively leafless season they blocked the view effectively.

Suddenly Peter heard a gasp beside him. His glance followed the direction of Marion's pointing finger, knowing already what he was to see, and annoyed with himself for not being the first to see it and to point it out to the others.

A little ahead of them there was a gap in the trees, as

if a wide avenue had been cleared on purpose, and at the other end of the avenue, crowning the hill, looking down towards them, stood such a house as one might dream of.

It was long and low. Three great gables stood in the middle and at the two ends, and the whole was of that warm grey which tells of granite overgrown with lichen. Here and there ivy climbed to grow round a window, or to soften the line of the massive porch in the centre of the building, but for the most part it stood proudly out against the skyline as it had stood when it had been built hundreds of years before.

During the weeks which had passed since he had read the advertisement Peter had often wondered how it would look, his dream house, but had found it difficult to picture in his mind. The classic examples of Elizabethan manor houses had not fitted into his idea of what Zabuloe Manor should be, and he had asked in vain that Sleeman and Keast should send him photographs of the gem they had advertised. The house he was now looking at was unlike anything he had seen in the books he had consulted. It was at the same time more dignified and more homely. It satisfied him utterly. It was all that he could have wished for—and more. This house must be his at whatever cost.

He sighed with a deep content, and then remembered at last the presence of his friends.

"Well, Bill," he said, looking at Lanteglos with a smile, "what do you think of it now you've seen it?"

"Now I've seen it?" Bill's face was an amusing study in dawning intelligence. "Now I've . . . Good Lord, Peter, it's not . . .! Is it Zabuloe Manor?"

"Zabuloe Manor?" It was Marion's turn to be astonished. "Bill's told me nothing about this! It isn't *yours*, is it, Peter?"

Her voice was filled with an awe which did not escape him. There was a grim determination in his own tones as he replied:

"Not exactly," he said, very quietly, looking up at the grey pile on the hill, "not *yet*," he corrected himself, "but I hope that it soon will be. And now let's get on. I want to see more of it, and at close quarters."

He put the car into gear again, and started off along the lane.

Laughingly he answered the questions that were showered on to him. He told Bill how he had written to the lawyers on the very night when he had first read the advertisement, explained how he had been intrigued by the obvious reluctance that had been shown about going further with the deal, detailed his persistent letters, and the final result.

"I got something out of them in the end. They had to tell me at least where the house was to be found. They've been so keen to warn me that I shall find the price too high that they've made me absolutely determined to buy the place if it takes a thousand a year off my income to do it!" He glanced over his shoulder at the house on the hill, now almost hidden again among the trees. "Especially now that I've seen it," he said, and closed his lips in a firm line.

"I'm not surprised," agreed Marion. "It's a marvel! What wouldn't I give to have the furnishing of a place like that."

"Well, it's precisely what you're likely to have," remarked her host, with a tight smile of satisfaction, "if I can manage to get these lawyers to come to terms. That's got to be my house, and my idea in bringing you two here with me was to get you to take over the job of putting it into shape for me to live in. How'd that suit you both?"

"Mere words," Bill told him, "are entirely inadequate!"

"Well, we'll talk about all that later. Here's Clowance. There's a lodge gate in this village. We've got to find out how to get to it."

A hundred or so cottages of various sizes clustered

round one of the typically Cornish churches with a square tower topped with four tiny spires. There was a spacious churchyard surrounding the whole of the massive block of the church, with a high stone wall between it and the road, a peaceful spot shaded by cedars, where old granite stones recorded the resting-places of the former inhabitants of this homely village. The houses were all of the old Cornish type, square built, of granite pointed neatly with white. In the windows were clean white curtains, and in the late autumn sunshine most of the doors stood open. It was easy to see glimpses of comfortable rooms inside, and cheerful housewives stood in the doorway, gossiping, or went about their affairs to the tiny post office, in one of the cottages opposite the church, its proud position announced by a hand-painted sign in somewhat uneven letters above the door, or to the only visible shop, in the one sash window of which were exposed its varied wares—pots of jam, a piece of rather fat bacon, a jar or two of sweets, a little pile of bootlaces, some faded picture postcards, and a cake or two of highly coloured soap.

The car drew to a halt in front of two old men, seated on a bench before a red brick public-house, probably about two hundred years old, but probably also the most recently built house in the village.

"The Zabuloe Arms," announced Bill with a smile at his friend. "I can understand what you must be feeling, old boy."

But Peter took no notice. He was listening to the directions for finding Clowance lodge gates.

They were not what he had imagined.

They stood just outside the village, a hundred yards or so from the church, shaded by two dark cedar trees. The granite pillars were there, but it was a poor wooden gate which swung idly between the two posts, a gate which had not been painted for many years, and one of its bars was snapped across in the middle, leaving a raw end. The hinges had dropped, too, and the latch no longer

fastened properly. There was a worn place on the lowest bar, worn by the feet of numberless children.

The lodge was a neglected-looking cottage with little dignity to uphold its proud name.

Peter's lips closed grimly as he drew to a halt in front of it.

A bent old woman came out to the door in answer to the hoot of his car.

"Is this the lodge gate to Zabuloe Manor?" he asked somewhat sharply.

"Es, zur."

She eyed the flamboyant car with evident curiosity.

"Then will you be so good as to open the gate?"

He made his request in such a tone that the old crone hastened to obey. It had seemed to her to be an order.

"Ed'n nobudy theer," she ventured as she passed near to him, "leastways, Miss Clowance ded zay she'd be back 'baout sex, by this waay. Ted'n sex, an' she 'evn't bin by yere."

"There'll be someone at the house, though, I suppose?"

There was anonyance in Peter's voice.

"Aw es, zur. Zillah'll be theer."

"Then that will be all right. You may as well leave the gate open. I'll be back shortly. Thank you."

The old woman stared after him, her mouth half open in surprise. That car going to Zabuloe? It was years since she'd opened the gate for a car. Muttering to herself, she went back into the cottage, then, thinking better of it, she came back and carefully shut the gate. She'd venture a question when they went out again. That lady in beside the driver had looked pleasant.

Neglect!

The wide drive which once must have been an imposing sweep was now uneven, strewn with weeds, green with moss. It must run on the crown of the ridge, thought Peter, for the trees fell away on either side and the drive itself mounted a steady slope, curving slightly. There

were signs everywhere that nothing had been done to this estate for years past. The tall beech trees stood in a tangle of brambles, fallen branches lay here and there, the rhododendron bushes which had once bordered the drive had grown out of all measure and overflowed, unpruned, to usurp much space on the roadway. Dead leaves, dried bracken, increased the general aspect of disorder. The lines of Peter's face set grimly. There would be much to be done here.

But when the drive reached the top of the rise, and the avenue of tall trees suddenly ceased to give way to a wide open space, none of the three could restrain a faint murmur of admiration.

In front of the house lay a wide terrace of huge paving-stones, uneven, now, through years of neglect, but impressive still. A low dry-stone wall, topped with large flat stones and broken by a shallow flight of semi-circular steps leading down to a sloping meadow which once must have been a beautiful and gracious lawn, edged the terrace, in the middle of which lay a large round pool with a fountain. The water was green with weeds, and the figure of a little boy which held the horn of plenty from which the water must once have risen in a brave shining jet was now overgrown with the straggling, almost leafless branches of a rambler rose.

Neglect !

Yet there was a grandeur, a dignity, a sombre beauty in that picture, with its wonderful background, the long, low building of the old house, which took away their very breath in admiration.

Peter had stopped the car

Very slowly, almost as if he were in a trance, he stepped down on to the terrace, forgetting all about the others, and walked with wide strides towards the pool. He was hypnotised by the beauty of this house. *His* house ! There could be no doubt in his mind that this was where he had come from, centuries back, generations ago. He felt it in his very bones. This was his home. He

drank in the details greedily. Everything was there, more than he had ever dreamed. Mullioned windows, stone porch, great heavy oak door, almost silver with the years of rain and sun that it had seen, its iron nails a rich red with the rust of centuries, and about it, in the stone of that massive porch, his coat of arms, just as he had pictured it, half covered with lichen, but still clearly discernible, the silver greyhound on an azure field.

For a moment he turned from the house to gaze back across the low wall to the glory of the view, between the tall beech trees standing there to frame it, over the sweep of grassland, down to the stream by which he had stopped his car when he had first glimpsed this house. But it was the house itself that held him, and he quickly turned back to it, a deep content in his heart.

All that he had felt since he had crossed the river into Cornwall was crowned at this moment.

He had come to his own place.

Zabuloe Manor.

"May I inform you that this is private property?"

In front of the old door, one foot on the first wide step, stood a girl, holding in leash a roan spaniel. She was slim and held herself with a curiously proud dignity for so young a girl, for Peter guessed rapidly that she could not be more than twenty or so. She was dressed in rough brown tweeds, but her dark hair fell in disordered curls round the pure oval of her face as if the wind had blown through it. Yet the disorder took nothing from the authority of her manner. Peter felt the red blood rushing to his face in his mortification. It was humiliating, but this girl had given him the uncomfortable impression of being a mere schoolboy caught out of bounds. It was ridiculous!

"I'm very sorry," he said lamely.

"Then will you be so good as to leave at once?"

She stood quite still. The dog, a friendly creature like all spaniels, sniffed the air in curiosity and strained at his leash. The sight of its overtures gave Peter a renewal

of confidence. He smiled, still apologetically, but with much more assurance.

"I'm afraid not, you know," he said quietly. "You see, I've come to inspect this house."

There was a distinct start on the girl's features.

"To inspect . . . ?" she began, then, as if regaining control of herself, "You have a paper of some sort ?" she asked.

Peter searched in his pockets

"An order to view," he said. "I'll find it in a minute."

"From Sleeman and Keast ?"

"Yes." Peter smiled more broadly. "Here it is."

The girl waved it away.

"Very well" It would have been impossible for a human voice to be more expressionless. "Do you wish to see the grounds or the house first ?"

Cold blue eyes, very dark under long, dark lashes, looked at him. He felt extremely uncomfortable. After all, what had he done to have such a reception ?

"I say," he ventured, "there's no mistake, is there ? This is Zabuloe Manor ?"

"Yes. This is Zabuloe Manor."

"And it is for sale ? There isn't any other . . ."

"No. There is no mistake" There was a hint of a break in the icy tones. "The house is for sale. If you will wait a moment, I will send someone to show you round the house and grounds"

She turned away abruptly, and with a sudden movement jerked the old-fashioned iron handle which hung beside the door. A loud jangle from the huge bell which was half hidden in the ivy of the porch rang through the stillness of the late afternoon. Peter waited in miserable silence in front of the girl, feeling like an intruder yet conscious of his right to be there. He was relieved when he heard steps inside the house and the door opened.

"Adam, will you show this gentleman over the house and grounds, please ?"

How sweetly that voice could sound when it spoke to anyone other than himself! The old servant, in shabby black trousers and threadbare striped coat, looked curiously at him as he replied to his mistress.

"Yes, Miss Clowance."

"The house first, Adam, as the light is failing." She turned back to Peter, and the change in the tone of her voice was more marked than ever. "You will have been told that there is neither gas nor electricity laid on in the Manor," she said, without a trace of expression, "so that you had better profit by what is left of the daylight. If there should be any questions that you should wish to put to me after seeing the place, Adam will bring you to me."

Without another word she turned on her heel and left him standing there looking after her. He was not having a very warm welcome!

The old servant smiled a private little smile as he followed the direction of the visitor's eyes, but he said nothing, and merely stood patiently waiting for the other to make some sign that he was ready.

Peter drew himself together with an effort, shaking his shoulders as if he had been caught in a sudden cold wind. Then he thought of his friends. They were standing by the car, from which point of vantage they had been watching the little scene. He went over to join them, after a word to the serving-man to wait for him.

"All in tune with the lawyer's letters, Peter," remarked Bill Lanteglos with a cheerful grin; "she certainly doesn't encourage would-be purchasers of the ancestral home!"

"Ancestral home?" Peter's eyebrows went up in a swift query. "Do you suppose . . . ?"

"My dear Peter," broke in Marion, "you can't have looked at her, and yet I should have said that she made a remarkably handsome picture. That girl is the image of what one would expect a feminine version of you to be."

"Even down to the frown and the generally insolent expression, my friend. I was always told you looked as if you owned the world and wanted to know what the rest of us were doing here, and that girl's got exactly the same look about her. She's a Zabuloe, all right."

"Well, I can see no reason why she should treat me as if I were a tramp, even if she is a Zabuloe," was Peter's somewhat curt reply. "After all, she's advertised this house for sale, and her lawyers have given me an order to view the place. I can't see what she's got against me."

Marion glanced at the low line of the grey roofs against the evening sky.

"It can't be very pleasant to have to think of giving up that," she said softly, and Peter, catching the expression on her face, was silent.

Giving up Zabuloe!

Once more he straightened his shoulders.

"Come along, you two," he said in a deliberately light way. "We'll have to visit it by candle-light if we aren't quick. Now, Adam, will you lead the way? You'll have to act as our guide. You've been with the family a long time?"

"All my life, zur." There was a soft slur in his speech, though it was more refined than that of the villagers. "Man and boy, and that'll be fifty years come midsummer. Twelve year old I wur when I come as page-boy to the Manor."

"Ah! Then you can tell us all about the family as we go round the house," suggested Peter cheerfully, and then flushed uncomfortably as he saw the glance of astonishment not unmingled with scorn which the old servant threw in his direction.

After all, the man couldn't know that he was himself a Zabuloe. Well, he'd learn in time.

They were led into a vast hall from which a wide staircase swept in a gracious and noble curve to the one upper story. The walls were dark and rich with linenfold panelling, oak almost blackened with the smoke of

the generations of fires which must have burnt in the wide grate, spacious enough to have roasted the proverbial ox. Peter's heart gave a leap as he saw again his coat of arms on the fire-back, black-leaded and shining sombrely. The great room was almost bare of furniture. Thick, faded curtains of dark damask hung by the windows; one or two huge and uncomfortable chairs—chairs true to the period of the house, as Marion informed him in an excited whisper—stood here and there on the stone floor, uneven with centuries of wear.

They visited a library, from whose shelves most of the books had gone, a long and lovely drawing-room hung with satin, which once had been green but which was now yellow and streaky with age, torn here and there, and carefully mended. They glanced into a vast and dingy kitchen, a dairy, a larder, mounted the wide oak staircase whose treads were worn hollow in the middle by countless feet throughout the ages since Elizabeth's days, and on whose walls hung a few portraits of bygone Zabuloes, grim fellows all, with black hair and the same blue deep-set eyes as Peter, the same frown and insolent expression, and here and there a woman would carry on the tradition, till Bill laughed into his friend's face.

"They're all giving you the same reception, my poor Peter!" he told him. "Can you doubt that the girl's a Zabuloe, now?" He pointed to a small portrait, hanging in a corner of the gallery into which the staircase led on the upper story. "Isn't that your Miss Clowance all over again?"

There was indeed a striking likeness. The girl in the picture could have been little older than the girl who had ordered Peter off her premises, and she had just the same haughty expression on her face. She could not be called a beauty in the ordinary acceptance of the word. Her features were not sufficiently regular, the nose was too short, the lips too thin. But there was an air of race, of pride that was impressive, and the eyes were wonderful

both in shape and colour and setting. The portrait was not a masterpiece, and almost certainly not the work of a great painter, but there was life and vitality in it, and one felt that it had caught the very spirit of the sitter.

"'Tis said to be the living image of Miss Clowance," ventured the servant, seeing their evident interest in the portrait. "'Twas another Clowance, too, so they do say. A regular spitfire, by all accounts. Murdered her husband when he turned Protestant."

"Is it a Catholic family, then?" asked Peter curiously.

"No, sur. They'm all Protestants, these days. Parish church, they do b'long to go to, the Zabuloes. But in them days—James the Second's days, they was—some o' the Zabuloes was Protestants and some Catholics. Regular to do, there was, by all accounts, between the two branches of the family."

Peter sneered.

"Christian loye and brotherhood!" he said under his breath, but not so low that the old man could not catch the words, and he gave Peter a sour look as he hurried them on to inspect the upper rooms.

Everywhere it was the same. Sparsely furnished and, what furniture there was, old and in bad condition. Care had not been lacking, however, and old pieces, into which the worm had eaten too deeply for them to have any market value, shone with years of polishing. Pieces of tapestry on seats and chair-backs had been darned and mended with loving care. It was shabby, it was eloquent of poverty, but there was a dignity in that very poverty which spoke of tradition and refused to be pitied or despised.

Peter felt more and more proud of his ancestry, more and more eager to own this wonderful house, to restore to it its past glories, to give back to it the right to be proud, to hold up its head in its own place among the highest in the land.

"Was the house like this when you came to it?" he heard Bill Lanteglos ask old Adam, as they were coming

down into the entrance hall again. "Did you know it in its better days?"

The man looked at his questioner for a moment before replying.

"Well, zur. It's been gradual, as you might say. Old Lady Zabuloe, Miss Clowance's grandmother, she was always a one for spending. Grand doings there were in her young days. And her son, too. Miss Clowance's father. He ran through a pretty penny in his time. After the war they had to draw in a bit. Those lawyers, they sold the best of the portraits. There wasn't many as was worth much in the market, I'm told, so the old lady wouldn't let 'em go. Furniture, too. There's a lot of that as went up to London. 'Twould've killed old Sir Richard, but he was dead a'ready, he wuz. Oh, no, zur. Zabuloe wasn't like this, not when *I* was a lad, nor when I wuz a young man, neither. You should've seen the young master's marriage feast! Them wuz times! Even when Miss Clowance was born, though she did cost her mother her life in the end. No, zur. Zabuloe's seen better times, an' not so long ago. Tes a shame to see the grand old place go down, that it es!"

"Well, never say die," Bill remarked brightly if tritely. "Better times may be coming. Who knows?"

The old servant glanced at him shrewdly, and then let his eyes wander towards Peter, who stood gazing out of the hall window on to the terrace. The girl was seated there, on the top of the terrace wall, her back half turned to the house, her head bent, one hand hanging limply to caress the silky ears of her dog. It was a beautiful picture, but a melancholy one, and an odd feeling of misgiving came over him as he watched her.

"I'm too old to change, zur," the old man said gently, "and I'll be with Miss Clowance till she sends me and my wife Zillah away." He heard a deep sigh. "That's the end of the house, zur"—he turned to Peter with a far less friendly tone in his voice. "Will you go and see the grounds now?"

"The grounds?" Peter turned back towards the others once more. "No. I think I'll leave that until to-morrow. I'll be over in the morning. Do you think I could speak to your mistress before I go?"

"Miss Clowance asked me to say, zur," it was a new voice which spoke, "that perhaps it might be as well if you was to ask the lawyers any questions you might be wishing to put."

A woman, as much the traditional family servant as her husband, as old and as shabby, and just as respectful and aloof, stood in the doorway.

"But . . ." began Peter, protesting.

He glanced out of the window again. The girl had gone.

"Very well," he said curtly. "I'll speak to the lawyers. And I'd be obliged if you'd tell your mistress that I shall be over here again to-morrow morning, and should be very glad if she could make it convenient to see me then."

He turned on his heel and went towards the door. His two friends exchanged a smile, took their leave of the old couple, and then followed him out on to the terrace.

"Well, Peter," began Bill Lanteglos, but the other man broke in quickly.

"That girl's insolent," he exclaimed. "After all, the place is for sale!"

Marion smiled with quiet amusement.

"She's certainly a Zabuloe," she murmured.

CHAPTER V

THE BATTLE IS JOINED

NOT even what Bill Lanteglos laughingly called Peter's rapidly-growing feudal spirit could tempt him to spend the night at the Zabuloe Arms. They went there for a late tea of the famous Cornish cream, with home-made "splits" and strawberry jam, but a glance showed them that it might not be advisable to ask too much of the inn's hospitality.

Over their dinner and afterwards in the comfortable smoking-room of the Royal at Bodmin, Peter had the enjoyment of listening to his friends' enthusiasm about Zabuloe Manor. He puffed at his pipe before the fire, drinking in all the praise, putting in a bare word or two here and there, content to let the others talk.

But in his own room that night he found that the "first fine careless rapture" which he had felt on the terrace that evening before the girl had arrived to order him away, was somewhat dimmed. He was still as enthusiastic about this miraculous home of his ancestors. It was all and more than all he could ever have imagined or desired. It was a home after his own heart, and the knowledge that it had been the cradle of his family only endeared it further to him.

But now there was a new element.

It had irked him that this girl should treat him so. It was unreasonable and unjust. The house was for sale, and he was offering himself as a purchaser. She had more reason to be grateful to than angry with him,

and he resented being treated like a trespasser, a poacher, a tramp.

And yet in his heart he was uncomfortably conscious that he would probably feel very much as this girl was feeling towards anyone who wanted to buy his home. She was only a girl, after all, and it was not for nothing that they shared the Zabuloe device, "*Teneo contra omnes.*"

His sneaking sympathy, however, in no way changed his intentions nor his firm determination that Zabuloe Manor must be his. First thing in the morning he got in touch with Sleeman and Keast, asking that one of the partners should go with him to the Manor that very morning. He was a little surprised at the apparent eagerness of the reception given to his message. He had expected the same reluctance that he had found in the replies to his letters, but the fat and amiable man who introduced himself as the Keast of the partnership welcomed him with enthusiasm.

"My cousin and partner is away this morning," he said, as soon as the necessary presentations had been made, "and will not be back until to-morrow. But there is no reason why I should not accompany you to Zabuloe. No reason at all."

"Then I propose that we should start at once," suggested Peter. "My car is at your door and there is plenty of room for you. How soon can you be ready?"

"Ten minutes, my dear sir, ten minutes—no more!"

"Good! Then I'll be waiting for you outside."

As the visit was to be a purely business one, Peter had already arranged that Bill and Marion should find another occupation for the day, and had seen them off on a train to Falmouth. He had the day to himself.

He was glad of this opportunity to discuss with the lawyer a few details of the business he had in mind, and lost no time in approaching the question when once they were outside Bodmin and on their way.

"I've been unable to get your firm to give me a definite

figure as to the price of this estate," he said, looking very straight at the fat man, who had settled himself comfortably into the seat beside him.

"Ah!" A somewhat embarrassed smile broke out on the other man's face. "That is rather a peculiar point. You see, this sale is an unusual one. It depends in all its conditions on the will of our late client, Lady Zabuloe. I must explain this point so that you may understand the reason why we have no control over the figure which we are obliged to ask. Not that I, personally, consider this figure as in any way unjustified, but simply that you may understand that it is definitely a question of taking it or refusing it. There can be no question here of offer and counter-offer, as in most negotiations of this sort."

"I see," agreed Peter, a trifle impatiently, "but you have still not told me what this figure may be."

Mr. Keast clutched the side of the car a trifle convulsively as Peter swung into a side road at a somewhat rapid speed.

"Well," he said, hesitating to cough discreetly, "the figure is an imposing one. Twenty-five thousand pounds." Peter raised his eyebrows. "Yes, yes," agreed Keast, hurrying on before his client could put in a word, "it sounds a great deal of money for a property which has none of the usual modern conveniences. I quite realise the effect that such a figure must produce at first. But consider, my dear sir. There are three farms included—er—no. I am forgetting. There are *two* farms only, but they are good farms, in excellent hands, good farmers, practical men who pay their rent regularly. The house itself, too! What a gem! A treasure, my dear sir!"

Peter nodded his head. Impatience was the note of his mood that morning.

"Quite," he said curtly. "But I am to understand that this figure of twenty-five thousand pounds cannot be diminished by a penny. It is out of your hands, eh?"

"It cannot be diminished, no!" The fat man chuckled nervously. "But it cannot be increased either, remember! That is a far greater point!"

"Increased?" Peter's eyebrows went up once more. "That would be a rather unusual method of doing business!"

"Let me tell you, my dear sir," the lawyer put his puffy hand on Peter's arm, "if it were not the case that this property *has* to be sold, under the late Lady Zabuloe's will, it would not be in the market at all. And if, having to be sold, the price had not been fixed by the will, you would not get it at *fifty* thousand pounds!"

He rubbed his fat hands together and beamed at Peter in evident satisfaction at the effect he had produced. For Peter sat with his brows knit in a frown. There was indeed something peculiar about this sale.

Keast spent the last few minutes of the drive in expatiating on the beauties and perfections of Zabuloe Manor, and in an attempt to discover more about his client. He was clearly anxious to know whether Peter was connected with the old family, and was clearly disappointed with the uncommunicative nature of his companion, for Peter was in no mood to talk. The lawyer's words had conjured up for him a host of possibilities. The uncomfortable feeling left by his reception of the previous evening was growing. In his mind's eye he could see the desolate attitude of that girl on the terrace in the fading light.

"If the price had not been fixed you would not have got it for *fifty* thousand pounds!"

That girl Clowance was also a Zabuloe, and the Zabuloe motto was "*Teneo contra omnes.*"

But his dark thoughts were broken into by their arrival in Clowance village.

The good weather was still holding, and all the world and his wife were out in the village street. It made a gay picture. Peter could not help wondering, as more than one group of gossipers broke up on their approach to gaze

curiously at him, whether he were not the subject of much of their chatter. But he swept through as quickly as possible, and drove into the Clowance lodge gate with a sigh of relief, though in his heart there was as much anxiety as excitement.

The fact that the lawyer had told him that the price was fixed once and for all did not hinder him from pointing out the bad state of the drive and the park. It amused and pleased him to hear the fat man's eagerness as he assured him that only a little manual labour would be wanted to set it all in perfect order.

"The park itself is of the kind that is best left a little wild, Mr. Zabuloe," Keast assured him. "Labour in these parts is cheap. I think you need have no fear on that score."

"But perhaps I might expect something different for twenty-five thousand pounds," suggested Peter grimly.

"Ah, but it is not so much the grounds as the house which has such value," urged the other. "Look! Where could you find another such gem?"

And indeed in the morning sunshine it looked even more desirable. Peter drew in the car to the side of the drive and motioned to his companion to get down.

The roan spaniel ran, barking joyously, towards them. Peter had always loved dogs, and among them spaniels held perhaps the first place. He bent down instinctively to fondle the lovely animal, and it responded immediately by leaping up and putting its paws against him, while the man took its long silky ears in his hands.

"John!"

In an instant the dog was away.

Peter looked up at the voice. It was Clowance Zabuloe, he knew, and once again he found himself flushing. He would probably consider it a liberty in anyone else to fondle his dog, and once again he had been placed in a difficult position.

"You have met Mr. Zabuloe, I think."

Keast was waddling forward with ridiculously short

steps for so large a man, beaming foolishly into the face of the girl. As on the previous evening, the deep blue eyes were cold. The lawyer was sharing with him that haughty, almost insolent manner, but he did not seem disconcerted. Something had happened.

As his name was mentioned, the girl flashed a quick glance at Peter. For a brief instant her insolent composure was gone. She was startled. But almost immediately she looked away again, towards the car standing in a patch of sunlight, gleaming with its garish green paint and aluminium bonnet. Peter saw the glance, and the blood, which had left his face, rushed up again angrily. He seemed to see a twist of contempt on those thin lips as she turned back to him again, a faint hint of a smile which irritated him beyond bearing.

"Yes," Clowance was saying, in her expressionless tones; "I met this gentleman yesterday evening. Adam Richards showed him over the house. I suggested that he should refer to you for any further information that he might need."

"The information I particularly needed was the price at which this house is to be sold," said Peter brutally. This girl had aroused his anger and, when once aroused, it had a habit of smouldering a long time and unbalancing his judgment. "I've been told that it is for sale at twenty-five thousand pounds. Well, I'm prepared to pay you that sum."

This time he had indeed startled her out of her calm.

"No!"

She almost shouted the word.

"Indeed?" It was Peter's turn to look at her coldly and even a trifle contemptuously. "I had understood that there was no doubt about this question. The house is for sale, I think you told me last night. There has not been another purchaser since last night, I presume?"

"Certainly not, certainly not," intervened the lawyer anxiously. "There is a little misunderstanding here. Miss Zabuloe is naturally a little upset. It is very hard,

you will be the first to understand, to have to sell one's home. It has been a shock to her."

"Then I presume that the matter is settled?" Peter looked towards her. Every atom of colour had gone from her face.

"I should like to see your partner before the matter is finally decided," she said, in a voice in which Peter could hear a distinct tremor. "There are a lot of details to be settled. This gentleman has not yet seen the farms, or any of the grounds."

She avoided looking at him, or even speaking to him directly.

"Nothing could change my decision, as far as I am concerned," he said quietly, holding his rising anger in check. "I've already seen in what a disgraceful condition this drive by which I entered has been kept. Kept!"—he shrugged his shoulders—"I should say, rather, how disgracefully it has been neglected. I could hardly see anything which could discourage me more. Or could I?"

He spoke directly to Clowance now, and she met his eyes squarely.

"No; but there are one or two things that it might be as well for you to know, if you have intention of—purchasing Zabuloe." There was a little catch in her voice, in spite of her obvious efforts to master her emotion. "There is a clause in my grandmother's will by which it is stipulated that if I should be able to find the money to buy back the estate within ten years of its purchase, the purchaser will be *obliged* to sell it back to me. And you may rest assured"—her voice rose very slightly as she spoke the words—"that I shall spare no effort to get it back."

"Indeed!" Peter was deliberately insolent. He could read so much into the girl's words that was humiliating to himself. "I hope, in that case, that you will find the property in a very different condition from that in which I have found it. It is a sin to leave a beautiful

house in such a state. It would be in ruins if it had not been so well built "

This time there was anger in her face to match that in his own heart.

"That is exactly what I dread," she said, her voice cold and calm, in spite of the fire in her eyes, "for I can only too well imagine the type of 'restoration' that is likely to appeal to the man who could buy that car!" She made a swift motion with her head in the direction of the Bentley, and then turned to the lawyer. "I think it is quite useless for me to stay here any longer. If there is any way of getting out of this sale I should be more grateful than I can say if you will find it. If not, will you please draw up the necessary papers as soon as possible and let me finish with this business as quickly as it can be arranged? It——" Her voice almost broke for a moment, and Peter could see that the tears were very near to the surface. The blue eyes shone all too brightly. "It is extremely painful to me," she finished lamely, and her small, even, white teeth met her lower lip in a gesture that went to the young man's heart.

"Miss Zabuloe," he said impulsively, as she turned away.

She hesitated a second as if to gain control of herself before she turned back to face him.

"Yes?"

Her eyes met his steadily, and all the old insolent expression had returned to them.

"You—you would rather not let this deal go through?" he asked, already regretting that he had called her back.

"You ask me that? Haven't I made it clear enough to you yet?" The scorn in her tones cut like a lash. "Of course, you don't understand! How could you, a man like you! This is the home of my family. We've lived here for generation after generation, the Zabuloes of Zabuloe Manor. We've lived and died here and we've buried our dead in the little churchyard at the foot of

the hill. And now when bad times come and a mistaken——" she looked around her wildly as if in search of a word, her voice already husky with the half-stifled sobs which were rising in her throat—" a mistaken idea of an old woman makes me have to sell my home, you ask me 'if I'd rather the deal didn't go through'!" She laughed, an almost hysterical little laugh. "I've lived through hard years to keep it, to clear it from debt. I'd go through twice as hard a time, I'd work myself to death to keep it from going to the hands of a *nouveau riche* like you! If you had an ounce of decent feeling you'd know you don't belong here. You've no place here at all! It's *mine*! It belongs to *me*!"

Peter stood stiffly there as he listened to her. The sudden impulse that had made him call her back, that had prompted him to offer to go away, to give up this new-found longing of his, had been stifled the moment he had seen the expression in the girl's eyes as she had turned towards him, and with every word it became replaced by a firmer determination than ever to buy the house, to possess that home which was almost as much his as hers. He would show her how much he belonged there! He'd show her that he, at least, could give back to the old house its former dignity and richness. It should no longer be down at heel, threadbare, poverty stricken.

"Very well," he said coldly, "we shall see. In any case, unless your lawyers can find a way out of the difficulty for you, you may assure yourself that this house will become my property as soon as it is humanly possible. If necessary I shall fight for it. I believe, from what I hear, that I have a *right*, a *legal* right to buy it, if I can find the price" Deliberately he chose the most vulgar way of expressing himself. "Well, I *can* find the price. You can have your money to-night, if you like. If the law can make you sell it, sell it you shall" He bowed sharply, with an almost foreign little jerk from the waist. "Good morning."

Suddenly the girl's whole attitude changed. The tears came to her eyes and stood there, trembling on the lashes, her mouth became suddenly ugly as she fought to control herself.

"Oh, don't take it from me!" she pleaded. "Let me keep it! Can't you understand what it means to me? Surely you can find another house that you could buy? I don't *have* to sell it, if you don't buy it. No one else will want to pay so much money for it. The price is far too high. It's so far from everywhere. It's so lonely. Think how much you'd have to spend to put it in order. You could find another, more beautiful house, perhaps, with all your money, that would suit you just as well. *You* haven't lived here all your life. It would have been mine next July, mine, my *own*, and then no one could have forced me to sell it." The tears brimmed over and ran down her cheeks. She looked back at the house, standing there so proudly in the sunlight. "I love it so!" She said the words almost under her breath. "I love it so!" She looked up at him entreatingly. "Oh, leave it to me! It's all I've got now!"

But it was too late. Peter could never forget and forgive. Why should he? he asked himself angrily. He owed this girl nothing. Not even the slightest consideration, after the way she had treated him. A *nouveau riche*! The contemptuous words rankled him.

He shook his head.

"No," he said firmly, shutting his mouth into a firm hard line, parallel with his black brows which met in a frown as angry as the girl's had been a few minutes earlier.

For a moment she glanced at him, incredulous, her lips apart in her astonishment. Then they quivered slightly as they met once more.

"Very well. Buy it!" She turned away so that he should not see her face. "And I pray to God that you may not keep it long!"

He watched her as she walked slowly away, her dog at her heels licking her hand in an agony of affection, as if it realised that something was wrong.

The fat man was looking acutely unhappy, and now glanced apologetically at his client.

"You must make allowances," he began, but the other cut him off with an impatient movement of his hand.

"It has no importance whatever," he said in a tone of utter indifference. "I should be glad if you would show me the rest of the estate now. I have only seen the house. There are outbuildings, I presume, and then there are the farms. Will you lead the way?"

And Simon Keast waddled unhappily across the terrace shaking his head in utter misery.

He dreaded the interview he knew he should have with his cousin and partner.

CHAPTER VI

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

"HALLO, Miss Clowance!"

She instinctively pulled her skirt down over her knees and shot back the dark curls before looking back to greet the speaker. The swift movement loosened the two tears which had been standing on her lashes, and they fell on to her cheek and shone there. She did not know it, and held out her hand to the young man with a smile.

Bartholomew, more usually known as "Bart," Nancecullom was a tall, heavily built young farmer of about thirty, quite handsome in his countryfied way with his high colour, his warm brown eyes and his reddish hair. He had taught Clowance to ride in those lavish days when the Manor could still boast a few mounts in its stables, and he had always been rather a favourite of the girl's. In a vague way she had considered him as her special property, and it was well known in the country-side that he was her hopeless admirer, much as her spaniel dog, to whom, in spite of their difference in colouring, he bore a queer resemblance.

He noticed the tears. He was quick to notice anything that concerned Clowance Zabuloe.

"Good afternoon, Bart!" The smile was not too steady, nor was the soft voice. Peter would have been surprised if he could have heard how sweet that voice could sound when it was not speaking to him. "Where are you off to?"

"I've just been down to see your man Mason at Trewint. We wanted a load of hay from him. Father

seems to think we haven't enough to last us through, and I wanted to be sure we could count on some from him." He eyed the girl closely. "I say, is anything wrong, Miss Clowance?"

She nodded her head slowly with tight-drawn lips.

"Yes," she said. She swallowed hard before going on. "Bart, I've got to sell Zabuloe!"

"Sell Zabuloe? Why, I thought . . ."

"So did I, Bart. But it seems that it isn't mine till July, and Granny left instructions that it was to be sold if possible before then. She was afraid of leaving me so poor," she added hastily, in eager defence of her old grandmother, seeing the anger and incredulity in the man's eyes, "and now someone's come with enough money to buy it, and Mr. Sleeman says we're forced to sell."

"But, Miss Clowance, this is terrible! There must be some way out! Zabuloe without you? Can't Mr. Sleeman . . .?"

The girl shook her head.

"No," she said miserably. "I can hardly bear to think about it. I'd come up here to be by myself, to try to get used to it somehow. I've got to give it up in a month. The papers are to be signed to-morrow. Oh, Bart! I never imagined that anything so horrible could ever happen to me! To have to leave Zabuloe, to have to give it up to a stranger!"

"That's hard! That's cruel hard!" The young man stood looking down for a moment at the girl's slender figure as she sat, her arms round her knees, looking towards the woods on the low hill across the valley, where the grey block of Zabuloe Manor stood out clearly above the trees. She seemed so desolate, sitting there all alone, that it made his very heart ache.

"What shall you do?" he asked at last, trying to make his question sound calm and natural.

"I'm just trying to decide. You see, Granny has stipulated that Trewint is still to belong to me." She

smiled a little bitterly. "You see, Granny was a Trewint. I'm afraid she always cared more for Trewint than for Zabuloe. She told Mr. Sleeman that it was a small place that I could manage to live in very easily. I suppose I could. Mason is only a bachelor, and he isn't the tenant of the farm. He's just running it for me. The house is a good one. Old Adam and Zillah could easily run it for me. It wouldn't cost much, either. I could live there on what the farm brings in, if I'm careful. But the thing I'm trying to decide is whether I can *bear* to live there, so close to Zabuloe, when that man will be there, perhaps tearing it to bits, to make a garage for his vulgar cars, to put in the electric light and central heating that he'll want to make it into the kind of modern hotel he's likely to care for!"

A sudden light broke on Bart Nancecullom's face.

"Is it *that* fellow? The man with that great glaring green car that's been in and out of the village these last ten days? Well, no wonder you hate the thought of *him* living at the Manor! What on earth made him buy a place like that? It can't be his sort."

Clowance laughed. The bitterness of the sound startled the man.

"That's the worst of it all, Bart," she told him. "Think of it! That man is called Zabuloe! Zabuloe!" She laughed again. There was a horrible catch in her voice. "But he shan't stay there long!"

He looked at her in astonishment.

"Well, if he's got all this money, Miss Clowance, I can't see how you're going to stop him," he said slowly. "He may not *live* in the place much, but I suppose it tickles his pride to think he owns it."

In a flash the girl was on her feet, her hand on the young man's arm, her eyes, brilliant with eagerness, looking straight into his.

"He shan't own it," she said, and then, noting the alarm in her companion's face, "no! I'm not mad, Bart," she assured him. "But there's just one chance

for me. Granny left it as a condition of the sale that if I could buy back the place within ten years the purchaser *must* sell it back to me! Ten years! I've got ten years to find the money to buy it back! I shall pray God every day of my life to show me a way to do it!"

"God!" This time it was the man's turn to laugh bitterly. "It doesn't look much as if God would be much use to you, or why has He allowed this boulder to take away your home from you? Oh, I know you believe in God, Miss Clowance. But you're hardly more than a child yet. You wait till life's shown you a bit of what it can do! If there's a God, what did He want to make all us wretched human beings for, and turn us into the world to suffer and work and suffer again until we die? You remember my mother? She was as near to being an angel as I'll ever see, and yet look at what your God let happen to her! She married my father, and as happy and pretty a girl there's never been, by all accounts. Then *I* was born. And from that day my mother was a cripple, bed-ridden, suffering! Glad to die, she was, although she loved my father and me! That's the sort of thing your God does! And you, now! You've been pretty near to starving these last years, to clear off the debts from that fine home of yours, in the hope of living there later on as a Zabuloe should, and just when the bad days were coming near their end, this chap comes along with money and buys it over your head! Well, I believe so little in heaven or hell that if I thought I could get away without it being traced to me I'd kill the fellow with my own hands before he could sign those papers to-morrow and buy it! But believe me, Miss Clowance, this life's all we've got, and we've got to make the best of it. I doubt if it'd do you much good in the end for me to kill him, even if I got a chance." He shrugged his shoulders with a wry smile. "And maybe I can be of more use to you free and alive than in prison or hanged."

Clowance shook her head sadly.

"Oh, Bart," she said gently, "it makes me very unhappy to hear you talk like that. Can't you see that it's just these hard things that happen to us in this world that make it so *certain* that there must be a life after death? Your dear mother knew it. Surely that must convince you?"

"No," blurted out the man fiercely, "it doesn't! Religion! You look at our own villages, these villages around Zabuloe—Clowance, Trewint and Marhamchapel. Church and chapel folk despising one another, a set of self-righteous creatures, the whole lot. Local preachers in the Methodist chapels, proud to set up as more holy than their neighbours. Folks that go to the parish church considering themselves as being a 'cut above the chapel folk.' And the whole lot of them only too glad to do a bit of spiteful gossiping if they get the chance! I know them all! And the parsons themselves! No better than their congregations! Religion! I tell you I've no use for it. And I shouldn't count on that God of yours to get you back Zabuloe."

There was a bitter sneer in his voice and on his lips. Then suddenly he turned to the girl, and his whole expression changed in an instant.

"I'm sorry," he said, taking her hand in his. "I know you don't think as I do, and I've no business to talk like this to you, Miss Clowance. But don't leave us alone here. Stay at Trewint! Something's sure to turn up. It would be too cruel if you had to give up Zabuloe altogether."

She smiled at him gratefully.

"Thank you, Bart. You help me to keep up hope," she said. "I think I must stay at Trewint, after all. Somehow I don't feel as if I could *live* right away from Zabuloe!"

She turned away quickly to hide her quivering lips, and Bart Nancecullom watched her disappear down the side of the hill. Her graceful figure in its brown tweeds blent with the landscape, and formed a part of it. She

belonged there. Instinctively he found himself thinking of that garish green car which had been seen in the lanes. The man who could choose that was to own Zabuloe, to take it away from that girl? It seemed an irony too great to be contemplated. He saw the tiny form go in at the lodge gate to be lost under the trees, and then turned his face towards home, a new cause for bitterness in his heart.

His father was sitting beside a bright fire in the comfortable sitting-room at Nancecullom Farm when he got in out of the dark, and it was with a sigh of satisfaction that he dropped into the deep chair on the opposite side of the fire-place. Then he suddenly contrasted his own feeling of security with Clowance's home-coming that evening. Her last evening in her own home! To-morrow it would belong to that stranger!

A frown came over his face, and his father quickly noted it.

"What's wrong, Bart? Difficulties with Mason?"

"No. Bad news. The Manor's sold."

"Sold? That girl Clowance sold Zabuloe Manor? I don't believe it! Someone's been telling you a yarn, lad."

"No, father. It's true enough. I had it from Miss Clowance herself. She's heart-broken."

The old man looked keenly at his son for a long minute before speaking.

"H'm. Still eating your heart out over that girl? Why don't you tell her so and be done with it?" he asked gruffly.

Bart glanced up angrily.

"She's a Zabuloe and I'm a farmer's son," he answered curtly.

"Nonsense, man! This is the twentieth century. The Nanceculloms are good stock and your mother came from even better. You'll be left no pauper when I go, I may tell you, and you're a handsome enough fellow to please any girl with eyes in her head. Good enough

for any ruined Zabuloe!" The old man's face was flushed. "Marry her, lad. My credit's good enough for us to take up that mortgage on the old house. I've always dreamed of you at the Manor. Tell her you love her. See how she takes it."

"I can't, father! Can't you understand? Just when things are all going so badly?"

"No, I can't," replied the old man bluntly. "A pack of nonsense. But what's this about selling the Manor? Tell me."

Bart took out his pipe and filled it before replying.

"Some man from London, they say. I've seen him around in his car, a flaring green affair. Pots of money, I should say."

"And Miss Clowance has sold the Manor to *that* sort of a man? That mortgage isn't due to be foreclosed yet. Why has she sold it?"

Patiently Bart explained what Clowance had told him about her grandmother's will. The old farmer listened in silence.

"Trewint left to her, is it? Well, it's time I went and saw that lawyer. I've put it off long enough. You're sure about Trewint, son?" He looked up keenly.

"Certain. But I don't quite see what it has to do with us, anyway."

"You don't, eh? Well, you soon may. I lent the old lady two thousand pounds on the security of Trewint, my boy. That's what it's got to do with us!" He chuckled grimly.

"But you wouldn't ask that poor child to pay you your two thousand just now, would you?" exclaimed his son, aghast, "why, it would be cruelty!"

"Gently, gently! I'm not cruel, my boy, and I'm not a fool, either. But I've an idea in my mind. I'll maybe see you master of Zabuloe Manor yet, son! Ten years, you say, she has to buy the house back. Ten years. Well, that's a good spell. And is she staying on at Trewint?" A cunning gleam came into the old eyes

under their bushy grey brows. "Is she staying on, Bart, or is it too much for her to bear to see this stranger at Zabuloe?"

Bart frowned as he stared back at his father. What did he mean by all this mystery?

"She's not decided. I think she'll stay, though," he said, at last, half hesitating as to whether to reply, so much had his father's strange manner disturbed him

"A pity, a pity! But she may yet change her mind. And if she wanted to sell Trewint we'd be very willing to buy it, Bart. Mind you tell her that. We'd be very willing to buy. And we'd be generous about terms, boy. No scrimping and paring and taking advantage of her position. You tell her, Bart. See what she says to that."

"What on earth do you mean, father?" he asked in a puzzled voice. "What is this all about? Trewint's a good farm, but we can't offer a price which would let her buy back Zabuloe! And in any case, I really think she means to stay there."

The old man chuckled once more.

"Then marry her, my boy! Marry her, and I'll promise you that you'll be master of the Manor in a year." He leant forward and put a great log on to the open fire. "Think about that! Master of the Manor in a year!"

He got up from his deep arm-chair and drew himself up to his full height; a giant, he stood there, with his grey hair and shrewd brown eyes. No, there was no sign of feeble-mindedness there, thought Bart. He shook his head, half unconsciously, and his father, catching sight of the gesture, bent down to lay a hand on his son's shoulder.

"No, I'm not going out of my head yet, Bart. I mean what I say. Marry that girl. You'll both be happy at the Manor. I know what I'm talking about. And now tell me what you managed to arrange with Mason." He

turned towards the door and held it open. "Come into the office. There are one or two things we ought to talk about. We've gossiped long enough. Come, my boy!"

And Bart, greatly puzzled and disturbed, followed his father out of the room.

CHAPTER VII

IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD

PETER had several tedious days to go through. Old Arthur Sleeman seemed never to be available. His partner, Simon Kleast, was always ready to give information and excuses for his cousin's absence, but the senior partner himself Peter could not see, and without the senior partner no business could be done.

Peter spent those days in going through deeds and plans, studying every detail of the property that he was to buy, familiarising himself with the names of tenants. That the price he was to pay was out of all proportion with the value of the estate he had not the faintest doubt. Even had Trewint, a beautiful old house of about the same age as Zabuloe Manor itself, though a great deal smaller and more modest in style, been included in the bargain, £25,000 was a ridiculous figure to pay for a house in such a remote part of a remote county. That Trewint had been included when the figure had been decided upon by old Lady Zabuloe, Simon Kleast assured him. The clause excluding it from the sale and giving it to Clowance Zabuloe formed a codicil to the will, and the fact that the advertisement spoke of three farms proved this to be the case beyond doubt. Kleast, who seemed strangely to have adopted Peter, as his special protégé, suggested that there might be some possibility of obtaining a reduction of the figure on this count, but Peter saw the danger of disputing any term of the old lady's will. He was obstinately resolved to have Zabuloe

Manor, cost him what it might, and would take no risks, even for the three or four thousand pounds which might be saved.

His determination was put to a severe test at last. He received on the fifth morning of his stay a formal note, asking him to appear at the lawyer's office at ten o'clock and when he got there he found Arthur Sleeman alone in the comfortable office.

"Mr. Zabuloe," the old man said, eyeing him very closely as he showed him to the same deep leather chair that Clowance had sat in to hear of the sale of her home, "I have to fulfil a difficult task this morning. I will not beat about the bush. I want to ask you to give up your idea of buying this property."

"Indeed?" Peter endeavoured not to allow his astonishment to appear on his face. "This is surely the most extraordinary proceeding!"

"Yes; I know this must all appear to you to be extremely irregular. The property has been advertised for sale, and you have come all this way to see it, have been delighted with it, and have been willing to give the sum—the most unreasonable sum, I may say—that has been asked for it. Everything should be in order, and yet I am asking you *not* to insist."

"And may I ask why?" asked Peter coldly.

"Certainly. I am here to explain fully. I think that my partner has told you of the unusual nature of old Lady Zabuloe's will?" Peter nodded. "Then I will not go into that. But you will realise how hard it is for Miss Clowance Zabuloe. This sale is forced upon her, very much against her will, barely six months before the time when the whole property would have become effectively hers, when nothing would have persuaded her to sell at whatever price might have been offered. She has made very great sacrifices in the past few years to clear the property of innumerable small outstanding debts left by her grandmother on her death. And I am now here to tell you that I have made all the necessary

inquiries, and have made certain that, if you will leave the property to her, she will be able to clear off the mortgage in about ten years, by exercising the most rigid economy, which will almost amount to poverty for her, but which she considers well worth while. I am here to offer you Trewint. It is, as no doubt you will have seen, a very beautiful house, only second to Zabuloe itself. You will not find my client at all unreasonable as to price. For a man like yourself, who cannot contemplate living here, buried in the country, for many months of the year, such a place should be amply sufficient. And you would have the satisfaction of having done a good action. I cannot tell you how grateful my client would be. This means more to her than I can ever hope to make you realise."

As he ceased speaking his eyes sought Peter's face, but what he saw there told him nothing. It was cold and expressionless, and he could not help comparing it with that of the girl who had sat in the same chair so short a while before. There could be no doubt about this man coming of the old stock. The likeness was quite extraordinary.

But no answer came to his question.

"Well, sir, may I give a favourable reply to my client?"

Peter lifted his head.

"I'm afraid not," he said, a faint smile hovering round his rather thin lips. "I believe that I have a right to buy this property, and I intend to exercise that right. As you say, I have offered to pay the ridiculous sum that is asked for it, and I see no reason why I should not purchase it. And as for living there," he shrugged his broad shoulders, "I have every intention of doing so. It is quite time that my family's seat should be properly kept up. I have the means to do so, and I do not choose to let it remain in the hands of someone who can only hope to drag out a life of a pauper there. I owe nothing to Miss Zabuloe, and see no reason for

making any sacrifice for her. Is there anything else that you wish to say to me?"

The old lawyer flushed red under his parchment-coloured skin. He looked Peter straight in the eye, and then sat back in his chair.

"In those circumstances, nothing." He pressed the button of his desk bell. "The papers will be ready for your signature to-morrow afternoon. Good morning. Thomas, will you show this gentleman out, if you please?"

He did not offer his hand, and Peter contented himself with a stiff little bow as he left the room.

The business went forward quickly after that. Two days later he was speeding back to London, the proprietor of the home of his ancestors, but not a very happy man.

Bill and Marion Lanteglos knew nothing of the story of that purchase. Peter had not felt willing to tell them of that fight. He kept it to himself, and his two friends found it difficult to understand the inexplicable gloom which seemed to have fallen back on to the newly made "Squire," as Bill laughingly called him.

His interest in his purchase, however, was in no way lessened. Bill managed to come to a friendly agreement with his firm which allowed him to put his services entirely at Peter's disposal while the alterations and repairs at Zabuloe were in progress, and the three of them spent many a long winter evening poring over estimates and plans, deep in schemes to give the old manor house all the benefits of modern science without taking away from its old-time glory and charm.

Bill was an artist. For the first time in his life he had a job after his own heart and, above all, almost unlimited money with which to carry out his plans. Peter had given him instructions that he was to spare no expense, to employ the best men available, the best materials in the market. He himself insisted on seeing and approving sketches of all alterations before they

were put in hand, but he had great faith in his friend's ability and taste, and daily had cause to congratulate himself on having secured his help.

Marion had her part also. Peter had found that the furniture—such as was left, indeed—was included in his purchase, and all those pictures of past Zabuloes and their ladies. He had sent a message that he hoped that Miss Clowance Zabuloe would choose for herself such pieces of furniture as she especially cared for and any one of the family portraits that she might wish to keep. But his offer had been coldly refused, and in terms which made him as angry as Bill had ever seen him, though he was not told the cause. Marion rejoiced. She informed Peter that he had several treasures among his purchases, and already she was at work searching for materials, rugs, tables, chairs, beds, beautiful antiques or perfect reproductions, for neither she nor Peter had any prejudice against good reproductions, as long as they were not “faked.” She and her husband made constant journeys to and fro in those days, and after Christmas they intended to take up a temporary residence there, to oversee the work themselves.

Peter was busy in London. He had a number of cases in hand, and his reputation had quite suddenly been made by a brilliant case which he had won just after inheriting his fortune. He found it difficult to refuse the briefs that had begun to shower upon him, but he had made up his mind to pick and choose, and after the New Year he was determined that he would leave himself ample time to go as often as he wished to Zabuloe.

He only paid one visit there before the end of the year, but that visit was to have a great influence on his after-life.

He went alone to spend Christmas in his new home. Bill and his wife were booked for a family gathering, and there was no one else with whom he cared to spend that day, which so needs a family to make it festive as it should be. He had always spent it, in past years, with

his lonely old uncle, and now he had no family left, except, as he told himself with a wry smile, Clowance Zabuloe, who must be as lonely as he, but would hardly be likely to wish to spend Christmas with him !

Marion had arranged two rooms to receive him. There was no question yet of electric light, central heating, or any of the other luxuries that were planned for the old house, but when he drove up late on Christmas Eve, and had garaged his Bentley, now a discreet and shining black, in the old stables, he found a friendly middle-aged serving-man in neat uniform waiting to receive him, and was shown into a delightful room which he did not remember having seen on his first visit, warm with gleaming on dark polished panelling, handsome firelight furniture and beautiful rugs. It was not a large old room,

"It belonged to the young lady, sir," Davey, the servant, told him in answer to his question, "or so Mrs. Lanteglos told my wife. And it's the young lady's bedroom that Mrs. Lanteglos arranged for you to sleep in, sir. It's by far the most comfortable. Shall I show you the way now, sir, or will you have your dinner first ? "

Peter did not sleep much that night. The bells of the three churches, Trewint, Clowance and Marham-chapel, rang for hours their beautiful chimes. Peter loved church bells above almost all music, and he lay awake listening to those haunting peals calling into the clear night, thinking of Clowance Zabuloe turned away from her home. There was more melancholy than joy for him in the Christmas peals. To him the birth of a Child in Bethlehem meant nothing. But, lying there in that room, where the girl had slept all the twenty years of her life, the uneasiness which had troubled him ever since that evening on the terrace flooded over him, and the song of the bells seemed eloquent with sorrow.

His first night in his new home, in the old home of his ancestors !

Her first Christmas night away from her beloved Zabuloe, for which she had made such sacrifices !

He tossed impatiently in his comfortable bed and told himself that he, too, was a Zabuloe, that he had as much right to think of the Manor as his home as she to claim it as hers ; more, indeed, since he could keep it in its proper state, restore it to its proper position . . . all the old arguments with which he had tried to persuade himself for weeks past. But he was none the happier, and it was a broken sleep that claimed him at last, in the early hours of the morning, when the peals of bells died down at last, and the marvellous calm of the country stretched its wings over him.

He dreamed of her, and in his dreams she looked at him with the same cold contempt that he had seen in her eyes on the morning when he had told her that he intended to buy Zabuloe, and when morning came he decided savagely that he would go to church that morning and see her again. It would do him good to sit in the Zabuloe pew and show her that for all her contempt he was master of the Manor.

The silent, efficient service of the capable couple whom Marion Lanteglos had engaged for him soothed him a little. His fragrant coffee and the excellent grilled kidney and bacon, crisp toast and farm butter, yellow and firm, put him in a better frame of mind. He no longer wanted to flaunt his presence in the Manor pew, but he still decided that he wanted to see Clowance Zabuloe. He would hide behind a pillar.

He decided to go early so as to choose his seat and so avoid some curious stares, and he thought that it would be an opportunity to look round the little church. The morning was crisp and bright—"seasonable," as his servant Davey had told him, to his amusement and delight—and the walk down his long drive to Clowance gate was a joy to him. Already the men who had been engaged by Simon Kleast on his instructions had cleared much of the undergrowth, clipped back the shrubs,

raked the drive itself, and he found himself glowing with the pride of ownership at the sight of it.

There was no one on the road that led to the church. The Clowance lodge gates were outside the village, which clustered round the far side of the church, and the churchyard seemed empty, too. The bells had not yet commenced to ring for matins.

Peter stepped through the lych-gate with a curious feeling of excitement. Here, inside these moss-grown walls, his ancestors lay! He wandered up and down the neat paths, spelling out the old epitaphs, deciphering the names graven on headstones green with age. "Here lies Thomas Trewint, and Elizabeth, his wife . . ." "Here lieth in peace the body of Peter Zabuloe . . ."

It gave him an awful feeling to read the words! "Here lieth in peace the body of Peter Zabuloe . . ."!

"Marnin', zur!"

He looked round with a sudden start at the sound of a human voice. He had begun to feel that he was alone in the world, so solitary was this country churchyard.

It was a ragged, unkempt fellow who stood grinning at him, his dirty and broken clay pipe hanging out of a corner of his mouth, his chin black with a beard that had not seen a razor for a week at least. Beside him was an open grave, and the sight of it made Peter shudder, the raw earth looked so cold in the frosty sunshine.

"Marnin', zur," said the man again. With his grin showing broken and blackened teeth, he made an unpleasant picture in these surroundings. "Looking at the graaves, be 'ee?" He jerked his trowsled head backwards towards the open grave. "Fine sight fur a Christmas marnin'! Te'dn fur you *this* time, nor yet fur me, not *this* time. But, bless you, zur, we've all got to come to it in time. You'll be able to pay fur your'n. Headstone an' all, most likely. Pauper's grave'll 'ave to do fur me. But 'tes all the saame in the end, zur. E'dn et, naow? Rich an' poor, graaves fur us all! King on his throne, you in yer thick coat, me in me rags.

We've all got to come to *that*!" He pointed with his pipe into the darkness of the pit, and chuckled to himself. "Won't help you much to 'ave a praper coffin with brass 'andles then! Aavens us all up in the end. Caan't get away frum that, zur!"

Peter shuddered and dived his hand into his pocket.

"Here," he said, laughing uneasily, "take that and get yourself a square meal somewhere!" He handed the man a couple of half-crowns. "You'll perhaps have something more cheerful to talk about after that!"

"Thank 'ee kindly, zur!" The grin was less saturnine, it seemed to Peter. "I'll drink your 'ealth and *long life*!" He chuckled at his grim joke. "Long life, zur!"

Peter watched him shuffle away out of the churchyard gate with relief, but as he turned towards the church himself, thinking to take his place now that the bells had begun to ring for the service, he could not forbear to look back at that open grave with its mound of damp earth, tipped with the frost of the night, and the old tombstone near by.

"Here lieth in peace the body of Peter Zabuloe . . ."

His body! And what of *him*, the man *himself*, the thinking, loving, hating, living *essence* of that other Peter Zabuloe?

Once more he shuddered, and although he hated to leave the sunshine he felt that he could no longer bear to stay in that churchyard.

Christmas morning! In the old days he had always attended the Christmas services with his father. There had been something cheerful, hopeful in those days, the carols, the decorated church, the children's happy faces, alight with all the excitement of that day which was so especially theirs.

As he chose his place in a dark corner, behind a pillar, and waited for the service to begin, he tried to recall the message of those old Christmas days. "Peace on earth, good will towards men!" That was something, anyway.

But he needed more than that. His encounter of that morning haunted him. He felt for the first time in his life an absolute need for reassurance. "Here lieth in peace the body of Peter Zabuloe." And the tramp's words, "We've all got to come to that." That cold grave, so pitifully lonely in the winter sunshine. Only that? *Only that?*

He hardly noticed the congregation drifting in, one after another, singly or in little groups, until the little church was full with the bustle of life, decorous and reverent though they all were. His thoughts had stayed outside in the churchyard. It was not until the organ began to peal out a stirring Christmas melody that he roused himself and looked around him.

Clowance Zabuloe was seated far from him, on the other side of the church. She was dressed in a little close-fitting hat which framed her face and gave it a curiously young and appealing look, and a long coat which moulded her slight graceful figure. He watched her rise to sing the first hymn, the old hymn that he had so often sung himself, "O come, all ye faithful!" The children's voices predominated, it seemed to him, and yet he felt sure that he could hear one pure, clear voice across all the others, just the voice which that girl must have. There was an almost rapt look in her face as she sang. But then the whole congregation of cheerful faces held something of that same look. "Joyful and triumphant!" They had an air of it about them, these simple country folk, as they sang the old hymn, and in his heart he envied them.

There was a cheerfulness about the whole service which impressed him. Even as a schoolboy he had admired the dignity of the sonorous words of the Church of England's service, and here there was an added charm of a sincerity that was a living thing.

A vigorous young farmer read the appointed lessons for that day with reverence and intelligence. Men, women and children joined in singing the old hymns

which had been familiar to him since his childhood's days. Joyful and triumphant they were, all these good people.

The whole service was a preparation for his mind to receive the message of the sermon.

The vicar was a man of about sixty or perhaps more, tall, slight, with a thin ascetic face and thick wavy white hair above his high forehead. His voice and manner, the beautiful balanced prose placed him at once as a man of culture, a scholar. Yet his sermon was a thing of utter simplicity, entirely in keeping with the surroundings, just what must have gone straight to the hearts of all who were there. Peter found himself following every word with an eagerness which was foreign to his whole nature. Here was none of the close argument in which his mind usually rejoiced, but a luminous faith and a conviction so unquestioning that it swept him along to the triumphant conclusion.

"God so loved the world, that He gave His Only Begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life!"

There was no assurance which could have appealed to him so much that morning, no message which could have been more welcome . . . If he could only accept it! If he could only believe it!

In his dark corner he sat waiting for the congregation to leave the church. He idly noticed that the Vicar, after following the choir down the aisle, had come back into the body of the church to give his hand in Christmas greeting to his parishioners. He stood with his back to Peter, but every word spoken by that pleasant voice came back to the dark corner. Just the right words, friendly and understanding, with none of the stereotyped manner which he had come to expect from all clergymen, and Peter's admiration grew with his decision to know more of the vicar of Clowance.

But he had not passed unnoticed, as he had hoped. One or two curious glances had been thrown his way as

the congregation had filed out, and as the last figure stepped out into the sunlight the Vicar himself turned towards him.

"Good morning, Mr. Zabuloe! I caught a glimpse of you back there. You should have been in the family pew!" He smiled with a hint of kindly mockery. "Too big an ordeal yet, perhaps, eh? I didn't know you were yet up at the Manor."

"I only arrived latish last night," admitted Peter, ignoring the first remarks except for a somewhat awkward grin. "I'm a bird of passage for the moment. I shall be leaving again in two or three days at most."

"Ah! Well, I wonder whether you'd give me the pleasure of lunching with me? It must be a little lonely, all by yourself in that great house"

"It is most kind of you, but I've my servants up there, and I expect they've prepared some sort of a meal for me," Peter found himself replying, wondering why he had refused this charming invitation.

"Ah, yes. A very nice couple. Wesleyans, they tell me. They'd be disappointed, of course, if you were to desert them to-day. Naturally. But I sincerely hope that you'll look me up another day. Mine is a bachelor establishment, but my sister looks after me very well, and is always ready to give a friend a simple meal. Any evening. I'm rather a busy man in the daytime. Mine is a widespread parish, and I fear I poach a little on the preserves of my neighbour and colleague at Trewint. I'm an old-fashioned Churchman, as you'll have noticed this morning, perhaps, and some of the country folk prefer the old ways to the new, so I'm often far afield. But in the evenings I'm nearly always at home, and it would give me the greatest pleasure if you would take me at my word and come in."

The smile was as friendly and welcoming as the words. Peter grasped the outstretched hand firmly.

"I mean to," he heard himself saying with an unusual

fervour. "I enjoyed your sermon this morning, sir, and I'm anxious to have a long talk with you."

The Vicar looked at him keenly with the faintest hint of surprise in his eyes.

"There is nothing that I should like so much," he assured the younger man, "but now, since I cannot take you with me, I must hurry back to my dinner—and you to yours! If there is one fault that my sister has, it is her passion for scrupulous punctuality!"

CHAPTER VIII

TREWINT FIELDS

"WELL, Miss Clowance! You're becoming a proper farmer!" Old Matthew Nancecullom leaned on the top rail of the gate and watched Clowance as she spread grain on a wooden board in front of her small hen-coops on the lawn outside the dining-room windows of Trewint. "Scientific hen rearing, I can see!"

"It's such fun, Mr. Nancecullom," cried the girl, getting to her feet and going over to give the old man a hearty handshake. "Look at the little dears!" Tiny chickens were running out from the coops and pecking greedily away at the food on the trays, fluffy little yellow balls, cheeping merrily in the warmth of the March sunshine. "Twelve out of my thirteen eggs in the first coop and eleven out of twelve in the second. I've another hen sitting. The eggs should hatch out any day now."

"H'm, Leghorns, I see. Good layers, and good table birds, too. You've started well, Miss Clowance." He smiled at her teasingly. "Now that you're all trained up to the job, you ought to marry a farmer. All the Trewints have been good yeoman farmers, like the Nanceculloms, right along the line. It's time there was a good farmer again at Trewint."

Clowance looked up at him.

"We're quite happy as we are, thank you," she answered gaily. "Zillah and I can manage the dairy and the chickens between us. It isn't a big job, yet, but when it gets really going I'm going to take their granddaughter, little Prudence Richards, and teach her to help

us. She's a bright little girl and will soon be very useful. But you talk of a good farmer at Trewint"—for a moment a shade of anxiety clouded her face—"does that mean that you don't think Mason is doing all he should? I'd asked Bart, and he——"

"Mason's all right," broke in the farmer. "He's doing very well, as far as he can. But a hired man's never the same as a man farming his own land, Miss Clowance. You should marry my Bart, my dear. That's what's wanted, for you, for Trewint, *and*——" he hesitated for an instant, and then, when the girl's questioning glance was on his face, he went on, emphasising every word, "and for the Manor!"

"The Manor?"

At the first mention of the idea of her marriage with Bart her face had flushed; she had been prepared to laugh it away as a joke. But the strange mention of her beloved Zabuloe in that connection startled her. She forgot everything else.

"For the Manor." The old farmer nodded his head knowingly. "Marry my boy, Miss Clowance, and you'll have your Manor back inside the year. I've told Bart so, and now I'm telling you. Mark my words. I don't say things idly."

"But, Mr. Nancecullom, I don't love Bart! He's a dear fellow and I'm very fond of him, but the idea of marrying him has no more occurred to me than—than it has to him!" She laughed again uneasily. "And as for the Manor! Do you know what that man paid me for the Manor? Twenty-five thousand pounds!"

"Well, and what of it? You've got some of that left, I'm certain."

She nodded her head, eagerly, glad to change the subject.

"Of course. The mortgage was for fifteen thousand. I paid that off at once. Then there was a good deal to be done to this house. It took almost a thousand pounds to put it in order and furnish it. Mason had only been

camping in two rooms ! But that has left me with nine thousand. Mr. Sleeman has invested it for me, but it will be much more than ten years before it mounts up to twenty-five thousand ! ” she laughed ruefully. “ And then there is all the money he’s spending on the house.”

“ He ? ”

“ That—that man ! He’s pouring out money ! I don’t know *how* much that will make, when it’s finished ! ” She shook her head. “ I doubt if I shall ever get the Manor back, Mr. Nancecullom.”

The farmer shrugged his shoulders.

“ Marry Bart, and I promise you’ll have it inside the year,” he said, and turned away.

Clowance knitted her brows. This insistence was extraordinary. She disliked the whole idea. It would never have occurred to this man, in her grandmother’s time, that a Nancecullom should be a match for a Zabuloe. She liked Bart. He, she knew, would never have made such a suggestion. And somehow it seemed to her extraordinary that his father should speak to her like this. Was the old man going out of his mind ? He could not hope to find sixteen thousand pounds, let alone the other sums that were being poured out like water to bring Zabuloe back to the glory of its past.

“ Well, I’m afraid I must make up my mind to do without it,” she said laughingly. That was the only way to deal with this unhappy question. “ I’ve no mind to marry anyone ! ”

Matthew Nancecullom turned back to face her.

“ And you’ve decided to stay on here, then, young lady ? ” he asked, looking at her keenly. “ Bart told you we’d be willing to give you a good price for Trewint if you should find you didn’t care to live so close to Zabuloe now that it’s no longer yours ? ”

Clowance winced at this repetition of that bald statement, but she answered gaily enough.

“ Oh, yes ! After all, I’m partly a Trewint, too, you see. It’s a dear old house, and I’m very comfortable

here. You must let me show it to you, one day. We've made a lot of improvements."

"H'm. And Mason's managing the farm all right?"

Once more her brows drew together. What was he trying to get at?

"Mason? He's a very good man, you know. And Bart's a great help. He often comes round to talk to Mason and give him advice."

The farmer nodded, but still lingered at the gate. What now?

He sighed deeply, turned away and walked a few steps, and then turned back once more.

"Ah! I'd almost forgotten," he said in a casual tone—too casual, thought the girl—"I've been wondering whether you'd care to sell me those four fields across the road. The fields that march with my land? They can't be much use to you. They're cut off from the rest of your land, and you only use them for grazing. A long way to drive the beasts. I'd like well enough to have them. They'd round off my land nicely. Think it over. We'll easily come together about a price. Think it over. Don't say anything now. Just turn it over in your mind. Talk it over with Bart. Ask Mason if it wouldn't be a good idea. I don't want to press you, understand, but I'd like well enough to have them. And now I must be getting along. Good day to you, Miss Clowance, and forgive an old man his teasing ways!"

Clowance watched him till he was out of sight. What an extraordinary interview! First, this talk of marrying Bart, and that absolute nonsense about the Manor. Next, that encouragement to her to leave Trewint. Then this offer to buy the lower fields!

Bart *had* mentioned the possibility of her leaving Trewint—most unhappily—clearly wanting her to stay. He *had* mentioned that his father would be willing to buy Trewint if ever she wanted to leave it. And, now that she thought of it, Mason *had* grumbled lately that the lower fields were a long way off and little real use to

the farm. She remembered that he had suggested, only the week before, that those fields would "round off Mr. Nancecullom's land nicely." Mr. Nancecullom's own words! What did it all mean?

She went back to her chickens in a thoughtful mood, and all day long the memory of the old farmer's words lived with her. Mason, indeed, brought them back very strongly that evening by repeating his mild grumble at the distance he had been obliged to drive the cattle which had been grazing those far fields.

"We 'aven't nough bastes to be keepin' so many fields, Miss Clowance," he said at last, and she thought she could trace a hint of self-consciousness in his manner, as if this was not a suggestion of his own, but one that he was putting forward at the bidding of someone else. She knew her Mason rather well by now "Trewint doan't belong to have no fields 'cross the road. In my graandfaather's daay, them was Nancecullom fields, them was." And again those same words "Raound off Mr. Nancecullom's land nicely, them fields would."

She smiled, but made no comment. Had the old man been trying to buy her man? Had Mason been bribed to persuade her to part with those fields? There had never been any question of their being too far away before these last two or three weeks.

She tried to dismiss the subject from her mind, but she found it constantly recurring, and at last, one morning about a week later, she made up her mind to speak to Bart about it.

He had made it a habit to drop in at Trewint once or twice a week to have a word with Mason. His advice, as she had told his father, had been invaluable, and in the few months since she had come to the farm a much more vigorous policy had been adopted in many directions, thanks to his suggestions and encouragement. Mason liked the young farmer, and adored his young mistress. Trewint would soon be doing far more than pay its way.

She waited for his next visit with impatience, sought him out in a cowshed where he was discussing questions of fodder with the man, and invited him to come into the house to see her when their discussion should be over.

Old Zillah had prepared glasses, "erby beer" and a "eavy cake" on the table, her idea of proper farm-house hospitality, and the two laughed gaily together as they sat down to share them.

"You wanted me about something important?" asked Bart at last.

Clowance nodded her head.

"Something rather odd, Bart," she said quietly. "And it's rather difficult for me to talk to you about it, in one way, though it would be impossible to ask anyone else to help me. I want you to tell me quite frankly whether you know any reason why your father should particularly want the lower Trewint fields."

Bart looked astonished.

"Father wants the lower Trewint fields?" he repeated. "What on earth for? We don't need any more land, that I know of. What makes you think he does?"

The girl hesitated a moment, but she had gone too far now to draw back, and she told him all that had been puzzling her since that morning's conversation by the chicken coops. The young man listened in silence, his forehead wrinkled, his eyes dark with thought.

"I know nothing about this," he said at last, "but I'm going to find out. I was rather surprised when he suggested before Christmas that we should buy Trewint if you should think of leaving it." He smiled up at her. "Thank Heaven, you've stayed, so that point's settled. But this is queer. He didn't——" he hesitated, "he didn't make any other suggestions, did he?" he asked, the hot blood rising to the very roots of his hair.

Clowance nodded her head soberly.

"He did, Bart," she said gently, almost glad to be able to dispose of this question once and for all. "You

won't be hurt, you won't misunderstand me, will you, if I tell you that I had to let him know that I couldn't think of that suggestion of his? You are my very good friend, Bart, but not anything else. I wouldn't lose your friendship for all the world, though. I need it very much. I value it more than I can say."

There was pain in the eyes that sought hers.

"And you don't think that—ever——?" he began, very humbly, pleading with her, his voice husky with emotion.

"No, Bart, I'm afraid not," she told him softly.

He heaved a deep sigh and got to his feet.

"I was afraid not, too," he said with a wan smile. "I'd never have dreamed of asking, left to myself. I think you know that, Miss Clowance, but the old dad's been at me morning, noon and night." He shrugged his shoulders. "He saw how things were with me! Can't hide things long from your father! Anyway, that's done with! I won't bother you with it again. And now perhaps he'll leave me a little peace, too!"

Clowance took his hand, holding it closely for a moment between her own before letting it fall limply to his side.

"You're a dear, Bart! I shall never be able to thank you for all you do and are to me!"

"That's nothing," he said gruffly, "wait till I do something worth thanking me for."

For some time after he had gone she sat deep in thought in the quiet room. She had not asked him what his father had meant by his curious words about the Manor, but it had seemed difficult to question him on that subject. It had not been the time for that.

Her thoughts had turned to her old home with less bitterness these last days. She was becoming more used to Trewint, and was happy there, her life was full. The old lawyer, Arthur Sleeman, had been right when he had told her to find herself plenty of occupation, to make

her new home comfortable, and not to dwell too closely on the idea of winning back the Manor.

"I'm a great deal of a fatalist, my dear," he had said. "I believe that if it is intended that you shall go back to live at Zabuloe something will happen to make it possible. Just now it will be best for you to think that it is at least a Zabuloe who is to live there, and a Zabuloe of the old stock."

Her protests about that green car which had been such an offence to her had been ridden down with an amusing anxiety by Simon Keast, who, she had found, had adopted Peter Zabuloe's interests entirely. That the car was now painted black she had seen for herself at Christmas, when she had caught a glimpse of the owner skimming through Trewint village one evening on his way home—to *her* home! The fat lawyer had been full of praises of the way in which the Manor was being restored. The details with which he insisted on supplying her, whenever chance took her to the office in Bodmin at a time when he was there, made her secretly long to see for herself what was being done to Zabuloe. But her pride had forbidden her to accept his suggestion that she should go and look for herself.

The new owner was not yet "in residence," as he pompously put it. The two friends who had been with him on the first memorable visit, a Mr. and Mrs. Lanteglos, were in charge of the alterations and furnishing of the house. A charming couple, with admirable taste and a great deal of technical knowledge. They had themselves suggested, so the lawyer informed her, that she might care to look over the house some day. The date of Peter Zabuloe's arrival was not yet known, but it was expected that he would be down at the Manor for Easter.

Clowance drank in the details with an eagerness she tried to hide. She would not admit, even to herself, that she was passionately interested in the man who had bought her home. She told herself repeatedly that she

hated, loathed, despised Peter Zabuloe, but she was still hungry to learn the smallest detail about him, not only all that he was doing to restore Zabuloe, but all his life, his career, his personality, and she was always disappointed when she found Simon Keast out on the days when business took her to the office in Bodmin.

She had become used to the idea of the old house being hers no longer, almost resigned to it, but her talk with Matthew Nancecullom, with its strange suggestions, had aroused all the old bitterness this morning, and rekindled the hope which Arthur Sleeman had been so anxious to put out. What could he have meant by telling her that if she married Bart she could get the Manor back in a year? What possible connection could there be between the two things, Bart and Zabuloe? Marry Bart she would not, but if marriage with him could bring Zabuloe nearer to her, then there must be some mystery known to the old farmer which was unknown to his son.

And Trewint fields?

Almost without asking herself why she was doing it, Clowance got up from her seat and hurried out into the hall. Her coat and a tight-fitting cap were hanging there in readiness, just as she had left them after her turn of inspection round her farmyard that morning. She put them on quickly, did not even wait to tell old Zillah where she was going, as she usually was careful to do, and ran out of the house, down the long lane which led to the river, and across the road into the four fields which a past Trewint had bought from some dead Nancecullom.

They were four large meadows, in which peaceful cattle were grazing; the grass was not good, they stood on a rather steep slope, and their surface was rough. Here and there rocks jutted out of the earth. This was almost worthless land, she thought, as she let her eyes wander over the whole extent of the coveted area. A positive Naboth's vineyard! She smiled, for the simile

was perhaps a little far fetched. Her neighbour had not showed such tremendous eagerness yet. But the idea remained, as she wandered to and fro over the meadows, that there must be something behind this sudden desire to buy her four stony fields, and a very natural curiosity made her eager for news from Bart as to what he should discover.

Bart did not see his father until late that evening. It was market day, and the old man still made it his personal business to attend markets when the Nancecullom farm was sending anything to be sold. This morning there had been some young calves, and he also wanted a word or two with his lawyers, so he had told his son.

They met at their supper table. It was spread, country fashion, with all the food ready set on a coloured cloth, very lavish, scrupulously clean, but without any particular pretensions to elegance. The two men set to work with an appetite on veal and ham pie, crisp salad and a steaming dish of potatoes, and it was some minutes before either had much to say.

"Good day, Dad?" asked Bart at last, as he piled his empty plate on his father's and put them both out of the way at the end of the table before helping himself to a generous slice of treacle tart. "Calves fetch a good price?"

"H'm," grunted the other, "none so bad. Might have been better, though. Not many people in to-day. Still, I'm not grumbling."

"And your business at the lawyer's?"

Matthew Nancecullom glanced up quickly at his son. No. The boy was busy with his tart. There was nothing special in his question.

"That's all right," he said gruffly, applying himself to his own plateful of good things.

"You didn't say what it was," remarked Bart cheerfully

"And I don't intend to!"

Bart raised his head and looked his father straight in the face. What had got the old man? Tired, most likely. Too long a day for him.

"Well, I don't want to know if you don't want to tell me," he said mildly. "I'll be a bit more communicative about my day." He laughed a little half-heartedly. "Can't call it a good day, but I expected no other."

"Eh? What's that?" The old man frowned. "A bad day? What do you mean?"

"I mean that I took your advice—obeyed your orders would be nearer the point, to my mind. I asked Miss Clowance if she could ever think of marrying me. Had to get it over some time, if I was to have any peace from you. So I took my time when the conversation turned handily. And I got my answer," he finished ruefully.

"Got your answer, did you? Well, I expect you went the worst way about it. Eating humble pie!" He stared keenly at his son's flushed face. "Well, the more fool you, and the more fool she. She didn't talk to you about that other matter, did she?"

There was a note of anxiety in the older man's voice which did not escape his son. This was proving easier than he had thought, for there was no one who could be so secretive and suspicious as his father, and he had feared lest it might prove impossible to approach the subject of those fields.

"What other matter?" he asked casually.

"Those fields."

The words were blurted out. There was no disguising the eagerness in the shrewd eyes under the bushy grey brows.

"Yes. She did ask me why you wanted them. It seemed to surprise her, too."

"Ah! And what did you say?"

"Simply that I didn't know, but supposed that you'd needed some more land."

"H'm! That's a fool's answer. You should have said

that those fields were old Nancecullom land. That I wanted to round out the bit of land we've got down there. You should have told her I'd been wanting them for years, but didn't want to bother her about them before I was ready to settle the question properly. And you can tell her, the next time she asks you about those fields, my boy, that I'm prepared to be generous about them. You can tell her about those two thousand pounds I lent old Lady Zabuloe. I promised the old lady that I'd never be hard on her granddaughter, nor press for repayment. And no more will I. I'll say no more about those two thousand pounds if she'll let me have those fields. Just a fancy of mine. A fancy of an old man to leave his son the farm as it used to be in the days of his great-grandfather. I had a look at the papers down at the lawyer's office to-day. It's all but a hundred years since we sold them to the Trewint of those days. I'd like them back, tell her."

Bart looked at his father in astonishment. Two thousand pounds for those four fields? It was madness! They weren't worth half that sum, nor a quarter. He'd been down to have a look at them after his talk with Clowance, and had been struck with the rocky, barren nature of the soil. Two thousand pounds? He shook his head, deeply puzzled.

His father, pretending to be lighting his pipe, his chair pushed back from the table, followed the play of expression on that open face

"You're surprised? Well, so am I, boy. Turning sentimental in his old age. That's what's happening to your hard-headed old father. But I can afford my fancies. I'd just about given up all hope of ever seeing the colour of my money again. I knew how deep that estate was in debt. So this would be by way of being a little windfall! Just a bit of sentiment, son." He stretched his legs, "I'm tired, do you know? I think I'll go over to the fire and doze there a bit. Don't disturb me, there's a good lad."

Bart watched him go over to his deep chair by the fireside, thinking hard.

A pretty little comedy, that little scene he'd just been through. Sentiment? Yes. Up to a point, perhaps. But not to the tune of two thousand pounds for four barren fields! Not if he knew his father!

CHAPTER IX

PÈRE ANTON

PETER drove down from London for a week at Easter. The house, Marion warned him, was not yet entirely in order. The electric plant was not yet installed, and there were quite a number of pieces of furniture still to come, but the general impression was clearly to be gathered from what had already been done. She and Bill were longing to show him their handiwork, for he had not come down to Zabuloe once since his Christmas visit, in spite of all his plans, and so the whole effect would be new to him.

He was therefore bitterly disappointed to find, when he arrived just before dinner, that a note was awaiting him to say that his friends would not be there until the next morning. The fame of what they had been doing at Zabuloe had spread, and a man in Devonshire had asked them to go over to see his house and give him their ideas for its restoration and modernisation. It was a unique chance and one that they could not afford to miss. He had specifically insisted on that day for their visit, otherwise nothing would have persuaded them to be away just when Peter was to come home for the first time to a habitable house.

He realised that it was unreasonable to feel aggrieved, but it was in no very cheerful mood that he sat down in his vast dining-hall to a lonely, if elaborate and indeed perfect meal. He must not grudge those two this new opportunity, but he felt very sorry for himself, in solitary splendour at the head of his long polished refectory table.

in which the candles mirrored their yellow flames, and on which his old family silver gleamed so handsomely. Shadows haunted the corners of the vast room, where the candle-light hardly penetrated, and flickered over the high ceiling. He was glad to take his coffee in the snug little room which had received him at Christmas, where the firelight kept him company.

But even here he was not satisfied to remain. This was not a night on which he could bear his own company, and on a sudden impulse, remembering the Vicar of Clowance's kindly insistence, he put on a thick overcoat and went round to the transformed stables to take out his Bentley and run down to the vicarage. It wouldn't do to arrive too late. In this remote country-side they probably kept early hours.

A neat and comely girl with fresh rosy cheeks opened the door to him. Yes, her master, Canon Holman, was at home. Would the gentleman come in, and what name should she say?

The house was delightful, just right for its owner, Peter felt. It had that pleasant shabbiness which speaks of not too ample means carefully administered. But his examination could only be cursory, for the Canon himself came out of a room near by.

"Come in, my dear sir! This is neighbourly!" He showed his guest into a warm firelit room where only a small shaded lamp served for illumination. "My sister is out at one of her women's institute meetings, so she will not have the pleasure of meeting you this evening. But I have another guest with me. Let me introduce you to Père Anton. He is chaplain to a Catholic convalescent home over the hill. Anton, this is our new squire. You'll remember I was telling you of our romance"

"Romance?" queried Peter, shaking hands with a man of about the Vicar's own age, but frail looking.

"Yes," said Père Anton with a slow smile which lit up the whole man, "the last of the older branch coming

back to take up the old house when it was left, poverty stricken, to a woman ! Most romantic ! ”

“ You seem to know more about my family than I do myself ! ” laughed Peter, warming to this congenial atmosphere. “ So mine was the older branch ? ”

He turned to his host, who nodded vigorously, as he drew up a third deep chair to the big fire on which a log was burning gaily

“ The older branch. Yes. A religious question, it was. Your ancestor was an eldest son. He turned Protestant in James the Second’s days, and his wife murdered him ! Not a very edifying story, perhaps. She had a son, and as he was old enough to have adopted his father’s convictions, he thought it wisest to go away. The grandfather was still alive, you see, and a staunch Catholic. The estate was never entailed, and so the old man left it to his second son—who rewarded him by turning Protestant himself, later on in life. But they never bothered to trace the murdered man’s son, from whom you must be descended. There were never any other Zabuloes in the country.” He turned to his bookshelves. “ I’ve a thick volume here, somewhere, with all the whole story of this branch carefully recorded. And as for your own part of the family history, you must have a chat with Simon Kleast, your lawyer. He’s been digging it all out for you. You’ve got a staunch supporter there ”

“ I’ll certainly take an early opportunity of doing so,” Peter assured him. “ But, I say, sir, I believe I’ve interrupted your game of cards ? ”

There was a small table with a baize top on which the cards were strewn standing beside the priest.

“ A mild game of piquet,” remarked Père Anton with a smile. “ It is a diversion we found for long evenings, but a talk will be very much more pleasure ”

“ Indeed it will,” agreed the host. “ If my sister were here I would offer you a hand at bridge. You play ? ”

"Very little," Peter had to admit. "I've been a very busy man and had little leisure for it. But it's a good game."

"So I think." The vicar smiled in amusement at some secret thought. "I fear that my love of a good game of cards is an added offence in the eyes of the strict Primitive Methodists of Marhamchapel!"

"An *added* offence?" queried Peter wonderingly.

"Yes. For you see I consort with Catholics!" He put a friendly hand on Père Anton's arm. "And between that and my cards . . .!"

The priest laughed softly.

"And on the other hand there is your colleague at Trewint who holds that you are too lax, too near to the Nonconformists. It is hard for you to please them all, my friend!"

The Canon turned towards Peter.

"I think I was so rash as to hint to you when I saw you at Christmas that I did not see eye to eye with that zealous young man at Trewint. I'm afraid I'm too old a man to change my ways. He is what has come to be known as an Anglo-Catholic, and I fear that his views are not shared by many of his parishioners. He's emptying his church—and filling mine. But on the whole we get on very well together in these villages that are grouped round your estate. After all, we all follow Christ in the way that seems best to us. That's the main thing, isn't it, my friend?"

The two older men exchanged smiles of understanding, but Peter looked at the priest with astonishment.

"You surely don't agree with that statement, do you, sir?" he asked in surprise.

"Indeed I do, Mr Zabuloe. The most important thing of all is to be a Christian and to try and live one's life to the best of one's ability in accordance with His teaching."

"But I've always been led to believe . . ." began the younger man impulsively, then hesitated, looking from

one to the other of his companions. "Isn't there a doctrine of the Catholic faith which says—I'll use the words of your own language, sir—*Hors de l'Église, point de salut ?*"

"Indeed there is," agreed the other, "but one must know how to interpret these doctrines. The Roman Catholic Church is not so narrow as you would make her out to be. It is an established belief of all good Catholics that any man who calls himself a Christian, if he sincerely believes in the form of Christianity that he professes—if he is an honest man, in fact—can win his way to salvation."

"Then——" Peter was clearly bewildered.

"I am a priest. I belong to the Society of Jesus. I naturally believe that it is *easier* for a man to be saved inside the Catholic Church than outside it. I would even add—and this will explain a little of the current interpretation of the phrase that you quoted just now—that a man who believes that the Catholic Church is the *true* church cannot be saved outside it. But there is no authority of the Roman Catholic Church who would be prepared to uphold that because a man, though a Christian, is not a Catholic he cannot be saved."

"Well, that's an altogether different view from what I've always been led to believe"

"My dear Zabuloe," the Canon interposed earnestly, "the aim of Christ was not to make salvation difficult for mankind, but to make it *easy*. That was the end and aim of His Ministry. 'He came not into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.' You may remember, perhaps, the text of my Christmas sermon. You were so good as to say that it interested you. 'God so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.' That is the very heart of all Christian belief and faith."

Peter sighed.

"I'm learning a great deal this evening," he said,

leaning back in his chair. "I had no idea you churchmen had such broad ideas about these things"

"Reduced to its simplest form, it is all very easy," said the Canon, in his pleasant voice, watching Peter's face keenly "Faith, belief in Christ, is the essence of it all. No man who has that belief, and to the best of his ability lives up to it, can be lost."

The younger man looked up and met that keen glance.

"You think so?" he asked almost bitterly, "Why, I think that this faith, this belief in the existence of God is the hardest thing of all. Once you have accepted that, perhaps, the rest may be easy, but that first step . . ." he stopped speaking abruptly and sat gazing into the fire in silence.

"And yet you are an intelligent, a cultivated man," Père Anton leaned forward, "and I should have thought that to the intelligent man any other conclusion would have been impossible. My friend Canon Holman tells me that you are a barrister. Your whole training particularly fits you to follow such an argument, which appeals to the reason rather than to the sentiment, which is founded on irrefutable logic."

Peter made a gesture as if to excuse himself.

"Tell me," asked the priest, "have you ever studied the purely theoretical basis of the Christian faith?"

Peter smiled a little shamefacedly.

"Well," he admitted, "I don't suppose I have. But, you see, I've never really studied Roman Catholicism at all."

"Roman Catholicism!" The Jesuit laughed merrily. "This is not a matter of creeds, my dear Mr. Zabuloe! It is a matter of the demonstration of the very existence of God. That is common ground to us all, I think. Canon Holman, here, young Mr. Nanslowe at Trewint, Mr. Vivian, the Wesleyan parson at Clowance, and Mr. Mitchell at Marhamchapel, the Primitive Methodist who so strongly disapproves of my visits to this vicarage, we all need, as a condition of our faith, the admission of the

existence of God. And that can be proved by the simplest logic."

Peter sat up and brushed back his thick dark hair from his forehead in a way that those familiar with his appearance in court would have recognised as utterly characteristic of the man in moments of deep concentration.

"Well, sir," he said, looking the priest straight in the eyes, "I ask for nothing so much as to be convinced. Will you tell me those arguments?"

Père Anton glanced at his host apologetically.

"I'm afraid I'm most shamefully monopolising the conversation," he suggested, hesitating.

"My good friend, I am only too grateful to you," Canon Holman assured him. "You are far better qualified than I to expose these things. I fear that my philosophy has become a little rusty with all these years in the wilds where it is not often called upon. My parishioners don't ask me for such arguments. We are all happy in such a firm belief in the eternal truths that we don't ask for their logical demonstration. But it will be a real pleasure for me to hear you convince Mr. Zabuloe."

"Very well, then. Let us just take three classical arguments, three simple truths asserted by everyday life. To begin with, motion. Daily experience goes to show without any possible doubt that there can be no movement without a motor power. Your mind, according to your demonstrative experiences, cannot conceive that a thing can be set in motion and remain in motion without the existence of an agent which assures this result. Consider, now, the whole mass of movements throughout the universe, and tell me what there is which could allow you to admit, in opposition to all logic, that there is not a supreme motor agent, a Supreme Being, at the back of it? Does not this consideration lead you *inevitably*, to the existence of a Being anterior to all movement?"

Peter met the keen eyes frankly.

"Yes," he admitted, with the slightest possible hesitation in his tone.

Père Anton smiled.

Canon Holman nodded his head quickly.

"Go on," he said, almost impatiently.

The Jesuit leaned forward, and continued his argument in his quaint, somewhat stilted style. There was hardly more than a trace of foreign accent in his speech, only enough to add a charm to his curiously light voice.

"Let us continue to interrogate all that is most certain in our current and direct cognisance. The most primitive man is led to observe that to produce a certain effect, whatever it may be, a cause is necessary. Consider whatever element you like in the world around you. You will be bound to admit that its existence is due to a cause, and that this very cause itself could not have existed without another cause, and so on *ad infinitum*. So, stepping forward from cause to cause, you arrive at a *first* cause, to which the whole universe is due, and which is yet different from it. Here, also, you are bound to admit the action of a Supreme Being."

This time his two listeners did not voice any comments, and after a pause he began again.

"All these arguments do not involve anything other than the most obvious data available to human reason. It is patent to everyone that no harmonious and organic whole is possible without the action of an ordaining intelligence. You cannot put together, for instance, in a bag, all the letters composing, let us say, your national anthem, and imagine that any fortuitous spreading of those elements on a table will ever compose even an intelligible text. The magnificent ordering of the universe, of the planets and the stars, cannot be the result of pure chance. It cannot even be conceived if you do not admit the existence of an Ordainer. And so, once more, these truths, obvious to the human reason, compel one

to admit not only the *possibility*, but without one shadow of doubt the *necessity* of God."

There was an impressive silence.

Then the Jesuit turned to Canon Holman.

"Is there anything in what I have said which the most exacting Protestant could not agree with?" he asked.

"Not one which even my difficult and suspicious friend, Luke Mitchell, would not approve," smiled the other, "but the important thing is, has it served its purpose, has it convinced you?"

Peter, under the questioning glances of the two churchmen, hesitated an instant.

"It has given me something to think about, at any rate," he said at length, "and so far as one can judge at first sight, I must say that there appears to be no loophole in the arguments. I wonder why we're not given more of those solid reasons and less nebulous sentimentality in the average church sermon. It would be showing more respect for the human intelligence, at any rate."

The Canon smiled.

"Have you much experience of sermons?" he queried, with a trace of mockery in his tone.

"Not of recent years," admitted Peter, "but I had a very fair dose in my school days, and I can't say that I got very much benefit from them."

"Well, perhaps if you'd been a more assiduous churchgoer you might have found that some of the preachers used those arguments too. But for myself I must say that I should find *unadulterated* logic poor spiritual food. I must admit to having a liking for a certain amount of what you call "nebulous sentimentality." The Primitive Methodists at Marhamchapel, I understand, prefer fulminations and warnings about Hell fire. And there," he glanced at the priest with a twinkle in his kindly eyes, "they are nearer to Père Anton's convictions than to mine. But, seriously speaking, Mr. Zabuloe, both are needed, the logical demonstration as a *basis* for our faith, and something else, something more intimate, to clothe

these bare bones. Personally, I find as much inspiration in the life of some of these old saints—for they are often little less—that one finds in our country villages, as in the most logical doctrines that Père Anton can produce. You must achieve an intellectual conviction of the *necessity* for the existence of God. Nothing else could satisfy a keen mind. But when once you have that, you will find that life will show you the need for the other element. You will be less impatient of those ‘nebulous sentimentalities.’ ”

“This is too bad, my friend,” said the priest good-humouredly, “here’s Mr. Zabuloe come down for a holiday and we are making him work. It’s already rather late, and I think I’d better be going. I’ve some walk ahead of me and I am not so strong as once I was.”

“I have my car outside,” Peter hurriedly interpolated, “if you’ll give me the pleasure of driving you back?”

“Excellent! Then we can have a few more minutes’ chat on less serious subjects. They tell me that your friends have worked miracles at the Manor, Mr. Zabuloe.”

And a pleasant hour of conversation on more ordinary topics followed until the moment came for the priest to return home.

Peter found Père Anton a charming companion on that ride through the clear starlit night. There was nothing of the pedant or the bigot about this man of the world. He was widely read, and intensely interested in all that was going on in the world about him. Not only philosophy, but science, politics, history, literature, all came within the sphere of his interests, and his opinions were well worth listening to. The drive was over all too soon, and he found himself saying good night with regret, and with a sincerely expressed hope that they might meet again.

“Perhaps when I’m finally settled in at the Manor you’ll give me the pleasure of dining with me,” he said, as he took his leave; “I’m afraid I shall never tire of showing that house to my friends, and you tell me you

are interested in such things. I'm told that it really is a gem, and my friends have collected some very lovely old furniture for me "

"I shan't even need that inducement," laughed the other, "though I admit that it is a very potent one. I should like to hear more of your inquiry into religious belief, for one thing. And may I say that I should always be glad to talk to you on that subject? You need not fear proselytism. I offer you philosophical discussion, though I dare say you may be suspected of the worst if you invite me to your home! My faith is not looked on with encouragement in these parts!" He laughed again easily. "But I must not keep you talking. With our chat at the vicarage it has got to be quite late. Good night to you, and thank you for your part in a very pleasant evening!"

Peter did not hurry back. He had very much to think about for one thing, and the idea of his lonely house did not appeal to him just then. He let the powerful car take him at a pleasant pace under the stars, and allowed his thoughts to drift.

The stars! The sky was full of them, for there was no moon and it was clear weather. The moon turning round the earth, the earth round the sun, and on its own axis! A heaven full of stars, each in their appointed places in the complicated scheme of things. The seasons following one another year after year. The sea governed by the rhythm of the tides. Eternal harmony! There was a great deal in what Père Anton had said that evening. Something at the back of it all. Some Supreme Organiser, above and beyond and before anything ever remotely conceived by man's mind!

It was a stupendous thought!

It was not, of course, the first time that he had heard something on similar lines to these arguments, but his mind that evening had been in a receptive mood and the Frenchman had known how to set them out, simply yet effectively. He had been wrong to tell Bill Lanteglos

that a clear-headed man must necessarily reject all religious belief. He must go into it all again, carefully, without prejudice.

What would he not give to find that luminous faith which he had so often seen in his two friends, with some impatience, perhaps, but with more envy!

He had been drifting along at barely more than a walking pace, and was now in one of those narrow twisting lanes bordered with high banks topped with gorse which abounded in the neighbourhood of Zabuloe. No sound warned him, for his thoughts were far away and the faint comfortable hum of the engine of his own car was quite sufficient to cover the distant murmur of the other. A haze of light above the banks in the near distance did, however, catch his eye at last, just in time for him to dip his lights as the other machine swerved round the narrow corner at top speed, headlights blazing.

Peter was dazzled. Instinctively he drew in even farther to the left, risking a ditch, for he could see nothing for the moment. Then, just as the other car flashed past, he heard a low cry, a body was flung against his mud-guard, and a moan from the dark made his sickened heart stand still.

He blocked his foot and hand brakes at once. Thanks to the slow pace at which he had been driving, the Bentley was drawn to an abrupt halt. He turned on all his lights to their full strength, hastily groped for an electric torch which he kept in the pocket of the door of his car and stepped down into the road.

It was the figure of an old man which lay there, scarcely twenty feet behind, doubled up in a queerly unnatural position. It was terribly motionless and still. Peter dreaded what he might find as he bent down to examine the body. Had he killed a man? He shuddered, though even at such a moment his lawyer's mind was clear, and he found himself dispassionately examining the evidence to make sure in his own mind of where the guilt lay. Even as he bent down and felt for the man's

heart he was rehearsing the details, memorising the very smallest facts.

There was a faint flicker of life. With a sign of thankfulness Peter hurried back to the car, remembering that his housekeeper in town had carefully filled the silver-topped brandy flask which was one of its luxurious accessories. The old man was moaning when he returned, and even that melancholy sound was welcome for the assurance that it brought. He poured some brandy down the man's throat, straightened the twisted limbs, took off his coat and spread it over him.

What else was there that he ought to do?

Inwardly he cursed the other motorist for going on his way unheeding. It was not possible, he had already decided, that the other should not know what he had done. In going through the facts in his own mind he had recognised that the first low cry had come through the night to him *before* he had felt the body touch his mudguard. More than this, that body had been *flung* against his car, as if thrown off from the other swiftly moving machine. There could be no doubt of where the blame for the accident lay, nor of the additional guilt of the other man for driving callously on.

He dared not leave the victim lying there in the road while he went for help. True, there was likely to be little enough traffic at that time of night, but a farm cart might conceivably drive by, with little or no lights, and complete the evil work which the motorist had begun.

A hospital. Where was there a hospital?

He knew little enough of his villages as yet, but he certainly remembered no hospital near by. From his recollection of the road, he must be very near to Trewint. The old man probably belonged to that village. It would be too risky to try to drive him in to Bodmin in search of a hospital. His car was a cabriolet, and while there was ample room for three to sit in the front seat, there was little enough space when it came to laying out

an injured body in which there might be complicated fractures, internal injuries, Heaven knew what !

The village cottages were not likely to be equipped with telephones—the thought had been latent for some seconds before he allowed it to come to the surface of his mind. Trewint ! Clowance Zabuloe lived at Trewint, and her house would surely be able to provide him with help in this dire need.

He blessed his great strength as he found how comparatively easily he was able to lift the old man. It was a very frail body, and his heart was moved to infinite pity as he heard a faint voice murmur in his ear as he laid his burden as comfortably as he could against the cushions of the front seat of the car.

“ Thank ’ee kindly, zur ! ”

Very slowly, with care to avoid the slightest jolt, he drove down the lane. He had been right. The lights of Trewint village were ahead, for the lane widened suddenly and straightened out. Very few lights there were, but Peter saw with thankfulness that over the door of Trewint House a hanging storm lamp was burning. He drew his car to a halt at the gate on to the road, slipped carefully out of his seat and walked up to the front door.

CHAPTER X

OLD BENNY COWLING

"MR. ZABULOE, zur!"

Adam recognised Peter with astonishment, and stood back from the door to let him come in.

"Is your mistress in, Adam?"

"Yes, zur. But ef she's still up I caan't say."

His voice was full of hesitation. He was still staring at Peter in the greatest surprise and puzzlement. Clearly he found it difficult to account for a visit of this particular gentleman at any time, but most particularly at eleven o'clock at night!

"Just go and see, will you? There's a good man. Tell her that there's been an accident and I'd like her help, if she could see her way to give it. Have you the telephone laid on to this house, by the way?"

"Aw, yes, zur!" Adam beamed proudly. It was one of the joys of his life, that newly installed telephone, though he was still half afraid of using it himself.

"Then just show me where it is before you go up to speak to Miss Zabuloe."

Adam hesitated a second, but there was a tone of command in that firm voice which he was quick to recognise and respond to.

"This way, zur," he said obediently.

Peter followed the old manservant along a wide stone-paved passage which might almost have been dignified with the name of hall, into a charming small room which

was simply furnished as an office, and nodded swiftly as the instrument was pointed out to him, standing on a small table with the blue guide beside it.

"Thank you. Are you a strong man, Adam? You look quite solid."

"Me, zur? Aw, I'm strong's a young horse."

"Good! Now go and speak to your mistress. Tell her that I'm wondering if she could put a bed at the disposal of a man who's been knocked down by a car. Perhaps only for a few hours. I'm telephoning for a doctor, and shall ask whether the ambulance had better come for the poor old fellow. I've rather an idea that he'd be better lying still for a bit. But the doctor will have his own ideas, no doubt." He turned to the telephone. "Away with you, Adam. No time to waste!"

Adam would clearly have liked to ask a host of questions, but he hurried away at that curt reminder of his duty, leaving Peter alone in the room.

The call came through quickly. The doctor, whom he had chosen at random from the telephone book, was a young man by the sound of his voice and the energy and decision with which he took matters in hand. The patient had most certainly better stay quietly at Trewint for the night if Miss Zabuloe would house him. He would be along himself as quickly as his car could get him there. He was luckily not yet in bed, having just that moment got in from an urgent case. Trewint. Yes. He'd be out there in a very short time.

Peter came slowly into the hallway just as Clowance was reaching the bottom of the stairs. All his life he was to remember the picture she made. She had evidently been in bed when Adam had gone to speak to her, for she had on a long, thick-quilted silk dressing-gown, from under which a silk night-gown just appeared. The green silk of the gown was soft and set off her dark curls and the warm pallor of her face. Her eyes were wide with an expression which he could not analyse. She stood hesitating a moment on the bottom step of the

wide staircase, her lips parted, as if she were not yet decided what to say, how to greet him.

"I must apologise for getting you up like this, Miss Zabuloe," he said quickly, thinking how queer his own name sounded in his ears, applied to this slim girl, "but there's been a rather serious accident just outside the village, and I could only think of your house as likely to have a telephone—and to be willing to house the poor old man who's the victim of the accident. Have I asked too much?"

"Certainly not!" Her voice was emphatic, but her blue eyes looked very coldly at him. "You should not have hesitated a minute! Where is he? Who is it?"

"Where he is—in my car at your gate. Who he is—I'm afraid I can't tell you."

"Adam, help this gentleman at once, will you? Zillah is getting a bed ready in the little blue room."

This gentleman!

Peter hurried out to the car. Adam had brought a large rug, having found nothing which was likely to prove easy to manage as an improvised stretcher on the twisting staircase. He spread it out on the road beside the car, and Peter, as gently as he knew how, lifted the limp little figure down on to it. Between them they could lift their rug easily, holding it as taut as possible, so as to keep the body straight. Adam showed good sense and a tenderness that was almost that of a woman as he helped Peter remove such of the clothing as could safely be taken off without too much disturbing the old man.

He was conscious now, and smiled with pitiful bravery as he endured their ministrations.

"I be braavely," he answered to all their questions, and not a word of complaint came from those white and trembling lips.

Zillah had provided hot water bottles, sponged the dust and dirt from a bad graze on the wrinkled forehead, and complimented Peter on his ruthless dealings with the ragged clothes.

"Yes, zur. That's the only waay. Cut 'em off'n him. No good, they'll be, torn like that!"

For Peter had ordered sleeves to be slit, trouser legs to be cut up, promising a new suit to replace the one that was being sacrificed.

"Old Benny'll be thanking you for runnin' ovver 'im soon," commented Adam with a grin, trying to help the old man by his jokes to bear the pain.

"Aw, he ded'n run ovver me, he ded'n!" protested old Benny feebly, "'twas me runned inter he!"

Zillah smiled a trifle grimly.

"Hev et jest as you've a mind to, Benny Cowling," she said, as if she were humouring a child, "ted'n no greaat matter, anyway. Jest you lie stell. Doctor'll be 'ere in no taime 'tall naow, an' he'll soon set 'ee to raights."

The doctor was indeed arriving at the moment. The sound of his car could be heard clearly in the quiet night, and a moment later Adam was running downstairs in answer to the summons of the front door bell.

He was a very competent young man of about thirty-five or so, and Peter admired his deft movements as he examined old Benny with a minuteness and a thoroughness that could not have been bettered. His clean-shaven face was expressionless as he worked, and Peter could see the pitiful anxiety with which his patient followed every movement, watching the calm face with an agonised suspense, trying to read his verdict there.

He was very brave, the old man, and only once during the long examination did he allow even the slightest moan to escape him. He made Peter think of an old dog which had suffered a similar fate, years before, and which he had taken to the veterinary's clinic. There was the same trusting look in these old eyes, the same unquestioning fortitude.

"Well, doctor," asked Peter at last, as the young man stood back.

"Be I goin' to die, zur?" quavered the old voice,

before the other could answer. "Ted'n noathin' to me ef I be. Tes loanly 'ere on earth, naow my Betsy be goane. The good Lord ded taake she laast year, Midsummer Daay, an' ef He was minded to taake me, naow, I shudden' be 'fraad."

The doctor's face broke into a very beautiful smile, and Peter felt a suspicious moisture in his own eyes as he listened.

"Why, no, Benny, you're not going to die just yet!" he said cheerfully, "there's a lot of life in you yet. Why, there's your little granddaughter over in Bodmin who wouldn't know what to do without her granddad! Just a little patience, and you'll be around here in Trewint as well as ever. There's a couple of ribs broken, though, I'm afraid, and that knee of yours is in bad shape. Patella's broken in two, I'm pretty sure," he explained, turning to Peter, "but I can't be certain with all that swelling. I don't want to give him more pain than I can help. The great thing is that you've been able to avoid all the worst effects of the shock by keeping him warm, avoiding exposure, and getting prompt attention to him. This happened just outside the village, you say? You brought him in yourself, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"You were alone?"

"Yes, worst luck," said Peter grimly, "the other fellow ran away, though he must have known what he'd done, well enough."

"The other fellow? Then you weren't responsible for this accident yourself?"

"'Tweren't he, doctor!" the eager voice of Benny broke in again, anxious to defend Peter. "'Twere t'other car as ded run me daown. Then 'twere me as runned into his'n."

"Sounds a little complicated to me," smiled the doctor, "but we'll take it from you, Benny, that this gentleman was quite blameless. I didn't get your name, sir?" he turned inquiringly to Peter.

" 'Tese ower new Squire ! "

" Peter Zabuloe," said that young man, laughing, " in case Benny's introduction means nothing to you ! "

" Ah ! I've heard about you. Most romantic. Old Simon Keast was telling me the whole story only yesterday. I envy you that house, Sir Peter. It's a jewel, especially after all you've done to it."

Peter found himself blushing hotly.

" I'm afraid you've given me an honour I cannot claim," he said a little awkwardly, " plain Peter Zabuloe, but I'm very proud of that. It appears to be the favourite name in the family. I've already seen quite a number of Peter Zabuloes in the churchyards at Clowance and Trewint."

The doctor stared at him in astonishment.

" I'm afraid I must correct you, Sir Peter, for *Sir* Peter it is. Do you mean to say you don't know about it ? Simon Keast spoke of it as if he'd told you." He paused a moment. " But I believe he did tell me that he'd only just got the final confirmation yesterday and had written up to London to you directly."

" Then the letter will be on its way down again, following me," laughed Peter, " for I left London this morning, and I expect Keast will have written to my office, as he usually does. You're the first to tell me, but you mustn't let it go any further. It would disappoint Keast to think that *he* wasn't the first to tell me the news."

" As you like, sir, but you must let me congratulate you. It's an old title and much honoured round here. It would have been a thousand pities to let it die out, as it would have done if you hadn't hit on that advertisement. Most extraordinary coincidence ! "

" Oh, yes ! But it may die out yet, as far as I can see. I'm not married, doctor." Peter smiled at the other man's raised eyebrows. " It's not in my line, I'm afraid."

" That's easily mended ! You're a young man yet." He noticed the newly made baronet's vigorous shake of

the head and forbore to insist, tactfully. "I expect we'd better be getting down to give Miss Clowance an account of things. She'll be anxious, I know, for old Benny Cowling was always a great favourite of hers. Weren't you, Benny?"

"Miss Clowance 've been very good to me," agreed the old man.

"Well, I'll be back in a minute or two. You just lie still, Benny, and we'll see that you get a good night"

"A long job, that'll be," remarked the doctor as they were going downstairs. "His family here are very poor. He can't go there. And I know he'd simply hate the hospital. I hardly like to ask Miss Clowance to keep him here all that time."

"Well," suggested Peter, "we might share things between us. My house isn't quite ready yet, I'm told, and I don't really know how far I dare offer its roof. I only got down from town this evening, and my friends, who've been looking after transformations and furnishing, etc., are away for the night. I've not even been over the place myself, yet. I knew they'd want to show me around themselves. But I've no doubt that arrangements could be made, and as soon as ever I can talk it over with Mrs. Lanteglos I'll let you know. If Miss Clowance could keep him in her care for just the first few days I'm sure Zabuloe could look after old Benny for the rest of the time."

"Splendid! That's what I'll suggest."

He knocked on the door of a room on the left of the entrance door, and entered at once in answer to the clear voice which told him to come in.

Clowance was standing beside the fireplace, where a log burned merrily. One small foot in a fur-edged slipper leant upon a beautiful brass fender. The whole room, with its yellow walls and furniture covered in a chintz in which green predominated, formed a lovely background for her. Peter's mind recorded another gracious picture.

Once more, as if deliberately, her eyes met his in a cold stare and then travelled onwards to the doctor's face. She smiled charmingly at him as she came forward to greet him.

"Good news, I hope?" she asked, watching his expression eagerly.

"Yes. Two fractured ribs and one knee-cap. But I believe there are no internal injuries, and his good Samaritan's care and promptitude saved him from exposure and shock. It may be a long business though. Bones don't mend easily at Benny's age, and he'll need a lot of care and waiting on for some time to come. I was wondering whether perhaps you'd be willing to keep him here for the first few days while arrangements are made for him at the Manor. I understand . . ."

"Benny shall stay here until he's well enough to go home," Clowance interrupted, very decidedly. Her eyes had strayed to Peter's face for one brief second, and their blue depths were like twin icicles. "Benny is a Trewint man. He's a special protégé of mine."

The young doctor, sensing something electric in the atmosphere, simply shrugged his shoulders with a smile.

"Then that's out of my hands," he said quietly. "Shall I give my instructions to Zillah or to you, Miss Clowance? Nothing complicated, of course, and I shall be over again in the morning."

"To me, please," said the girl, "but if you would excuse me a moment, I think we need not keep Mr. Zabuloe any longer. His rôle is over."

The doctor's eyebrows were almost imperceptibly raised. There was indeed something electric in the atmosphere!

"Believe me, Miss Zabuloe," Peter almost faltered in his embarrassment, "I had no wish to intrude on your hospitality for myself. I was merely trying to think of the likeliest place to find help for my invalid."

"You did quite rightly," agreed the girl coldly, "there

was nowhere more appropriate for you to have chosen to bring your victim."

"Oh, come," laughed the young doctor, "you must really talk to Benny before you treat the Squire in this way."

But Peter was flushing angrily. He had had enough.

"Well, if there is nothing else I can do for you, doctor," he said stiffly, "I will take my leave."

"You've been invaluable," answered the doctor with emphasis, "and you've probably saved the old chap's life with your timely brandy and all the other sensible things you've done for him."

"That's a cheering thought, anyway," smiled the young man half-heartedly.

"It must be a consolation to you," said Clowance, holding open the door. "But we must not keep you any longer. Good evening, Mr. Zabuloe."

At the door he hesitated one more moment.

"I hope you will at least allow me to come and see——" he paused and a faint hint of a bitter smile appeared on his lips, "my victim?"

"That is for Benny to decide," she said, after a moment's indecision.

"Then the answer will be yes," broke in the doctor cheerily. "The Squire has made a great hit with Benny, I assure you." He flushed, realising the unhappy *double entendre* of his badly chosen phrase. "Benny thinks the world of him already," he added hastily.

"In that case there will be no objection," said the girl in a toneless voice. "Good night, Mr. Zabuloe."

And there was nothing for Peter to do but to step out into the dark again and get into his car.

He drove back to Zabuloe in a towering rage. The drive from the Clowance gates to the Manor was now wide and the surface perfect. He ran his great car for all it was worth, swung round to the back of the house, slammed open the garage door, slammed it to again when once the car was inside, slammed the great front

door, and then, standing inside his own wonderful hall, he leaned back against the iron-studded door and suddenly laughed aloud.

After all, he had the best of her. She'd feel a fool when Benny told the true story of the accident.

And he was Sir Peter Zabuloe and owned Zabuloe Manor! *Sir* Peter Zabuloe! He'd never thought of that! Certainly he had the best of her!

CHAPTER XI

PETER AT HOME

HE slept late the next morning. All the weariness of the past weeks of intense work, the fatigue of his drive from town, and the emotions of the previous evening had seemed suddenly to come down upon him together, and the sun was streaming in at his windows, a mature sun of mid-morning, when he awoke at last.

He looked around him, a little dazed at first, but a moment later he was wide awake and beaming with satisfaction at what he saw.

It was not the little room which had been Clowance's bedroom which housed him this time. Last night he had been too tired and the light too dim for him really to appreciate the beauty of his surroundings, but in this intense morning light he was amazed.

It was a vast room, panelled from floor to ceiling, with two long windows looking out on to the terrace. Peter remembered how it had appeared to him when last he had seen it, on that day when old Adam Richards had shown him over the house. It had been closed, then, and empty, and the panelled walls grey with cobwebs, the floor rough and uneven. Now the wood on floor and walls gleamed richly, highly polished, setting off the beauty of soft Persian rugs and heavy, dull silk curtains.

He was lying in a great four-poster bed, whose hangings matched the curtains, a huge cupboard filled one corner of the room, and a massive chest of drawers stood against one of the walls. Ladder-backed chairs stood here and there, tall and dignified, and on a low table his brushes

were laid out in familiar array beneath an old gilt mirror, to stamp the room as his.

His room! He remembered that Adam had pointed it out as the room of the head of the house. Generations of Zabuloes had slept here, been born and died here, and he, the last of the Zabuloe men, had come here in his turn. Was the ancient line to die with him, and the old house to fall into the hands of strangers after all?

Marriage. That was the solution to that problem. Marry and bring up an heir to carry on the line, another Peter Zabuloe to take his place when he had gone to join that other Peter Zabuloe in Clowance churchyard.

"Here lieth in peace the body of Peter Zabuloe."

He shuddered involuntarily. It was queer how that epitaph haunted him with its reminder of the end of things. The end of things? That kindly old Canon. Could he and his friend, Père Anton, provide him with arguments as potent to prove the immortality of the soul as those they had brought forward to prove the existence of God?

That old man last night, old Benny Cowling, he had had no fear of death. "Ef He was minded to taake me naow, I shudden be 'fraad." How did that old man come by that implicit faith? The very words he had used had been full of a poetry. It was a mystery, which had shaken Peter's very soul. To face death, near, imminent death, with such calm, with such perfect serenity!

He flung himself out of bed, rang the bell impulsively, thankful for such everyday objects around him.

Davey's smilingly respectful face completed his cure, for the moment at least.

"Breakfast, Davey, as quickly as your wife can manage it. And in the meantime, what about a bath? Is that bathroom I used last night anywhere near?"

"Next door, zur. Shall I turn on the water?"

"Please. And, by the way, you might send someone down to Trewint, to Miss Zabuloe's house, to find out how old Benny Cowling is this morning."

"He's grandly, zur. Berry, the gard'ner Mrs. Lanteglos ded engage, he's come up from Trewint this morning. Adam Richards was tellin' him 'baout that accident. Terr'ble thing for you, zur, all alone, an' all."

This village telegraphy!

"So Benny's had a good night, has he? That's splendid. Is there anything we could send him down from here, do you think?"

Davey pursed his lips doubtfully.

"Well, zur, ef I might make so bold as to say so, zur, I don't think I should be sending things daown to Trewint. Terr'ble touchy woman, Mrs. Richards, an' it ed'n no good sending any o' that good wine you've got into the cellars. Old Benny, he's a toataller, he is. Lucky he ded'n know what you was givin' him out o' that flask o' yours!" Davey chuckled to himself, then, realising his place, straightened his expression quickly. "No, zur. There ed'n nothin' we c'ud send down to Trewint."

Peter nodded his head in agreement. It wasn't only Mrs. Richards that was "terr'ble touchy" down at Trewint!

"You're right, Davey. Well, my bath! And then the best breakfast Mrs. Davey can think of."

"Yes, zur!" Davey beamed. "You may count on Mrs. Davey, zur!"

As he splashed in his luxurious bath and felt repose sinking into him, fatigue drifting away, his thoughts went back again to Trewint. That girl! It was all very well to bear him malice for having bought the Manor, but was it never going to end? "Never let the sun go down on your wrath." That was in the Bible, wasn't it? The sun! How many suns was she going to allow to go down before she decided to treat him like a human being? Little spit-fire! "Your victim." Victim! Well, she might have waited to know a little more about it before laying the blame on him. It was going to make things all the more difficult, too, because she'd hate herself

for it by to-day—and blame him again for letting her make a fool of herself!

He was still at his breakfast, in his bedroom, when he heard sounds of a car outside, and, rushing to look out of the window, was just in time to see Bill and Marion Lanteglos stepping out of a taxi.

"Bill, you idiot, why on earth didn't you let me know when you were arriving? I'd have come to fetch you. Where have you come from now?"

Bill looked up quickly at the sound of his friend's voice.

"All hail, Sir Peter! Welcome to your domain!" He stepped over the terrace stones—Peter had given strict instructions that no car was to defile them, so that the taxi had been drawn up at the head of the avenue, where Peter's own car had stood when its glaring green had so offended the eyes of Clowance Zabuloe—and stood under the window. "We've come from Bodmin. You got Marion's note?"

"Yes, last night." Peter hesitated a moment, undecided as to whether he must take that title as a mere attempt at humour or as genuine, and decided on the former. "I say, Marion, I've not looked over the house yet. I thought I'd wait till you could show me around."

"Peter, you're a dear! I should never have imagined that you'd have thought of such a thing." Marion smiled up at him gratefully. "Davey has put you in the Squire's room, though, I see! I gave no instructions about that. How like him! I suppose he couldn't resist it. How do you like it—Sir Peter?"

This time there could be no mistake.

"How did you know?" he asked curiously.

"Old Keast. He's been bubbling over with it these last three weeks. Been digging up a whole pile of family history for you, and came to the conclusion that you had the right to wear the old title," Bill exclaimed, grinning. "Got in touch with the College of Heralds, or whoever looks after these things, and had the whole thing confirmed. I say, Peter! You *have* got a disreputable set

of relatives. There are at least four murders in the family! Only one hanging, though, and that was so long ago that I expect you'll manage to live it down."

Peter sighed.

"So it's true," he said thoughtfully.

"It is," Marion replied, with a new note of decision that was so serious that Peter glanced at her in attentive surprise. "And do you realise, Peter, that it makes it your positive *duty* to marry and provide an heir to the title and the Manor? You're the last of the line. The last male Zabuloe!"

"And that girl?" asked Peter, quickly, almost without consciously wishing to speak at all.

Bill grinned from ear to ear.

"She, my son, is the last *female* Zabuloe! So now you know where the path of duty lies!"

Abruptly, realising that he was acting like a callow schoolboy, Peter shut the window.

As he followed Marion from room to room, listening with a somewhat distracted ear to her comments and explanations, the full joy and pride of his ownership seeped into him by every pore, through every sense. This was *his*, this beauty, this dignity, this glory. This old house which had stood there for hundreds of years, housed generation after generation of his race, which had witnessed their loves, their hates, their sorrows, their joys, all the full round of their lives, all this was now his. He had transformed it from drab poverty to this rich though simple loveliness. And it was *his*!

Marion, watching his expression as he had gone with her round the house, had had her reward long before he had stopped as they reached at last the foot of the wide staircase in the vast hall, taken her hands in his and thanked her for all that she had done. She had seen growing in his eyes a deep brooding contentment that had warmed her heart towards him. This Peter Zabuloe was a different being from the bitter, disillusioned man of former days. Something was mellowing him. She

was too clear-sighted to admit for an instant that wealth alone could work this miracle. It had had its part, of course, but no amount of riches could have so changed the very nature of this man. And he was as yet only at the beginning of the path.

"Peter, it has all been a joy and a privilege to me, and far from your thanking me, it's I who ought to be thanking you for letting me have the doing of it! I don't know when I've had such a wonderful time as these last few months." She felt the moment to be almost too tense with emotion. "You wait till you've seen the bills, my friend," she finished with a little laugh that was almost a gasp, "then you may not be so pleased with me!"

"Oh, bother the bills!" broke out Peter. "You've worked miracles. You can't——"

"Not the one about breaking eggs to make an omelette," begged Bill, in answer to an imploring glance from his wife.

"No," laughed Peter, a trifle impatiently. "I don't indulge in that kind. But, seriously, I simply can't tell you how grateful I am. It's better than I'd even dreamed it could be!"

"Then I'm satisfied and thanked beyond my deserts!" Marion slipped a hand through his arm. "And now let's go and take a glimpse of the garden before lunch. I took the liberty to tell Mrs. Davey to put it a little late, since you breakfasted at such an unearthly hour."

They were sitting on the low wall which bordered the terrace when the conversation turned to the topic which had remained like a background to all Peter's thoughts that morning. Bill had asked him how he spent his evening, during their absence, and learned with some astonishment that his friend had gone, of his own accord, to call on Canon Holman.

"You? Do you mean to tell me that you went down there off your own bat? Why, I thought you couldn't bear the whole species!" he exclaimed incredulously.

"Species? You mean churchmen? Well, I can

understand your surprise, but Canon Holman is such a pleasant old chap, and he'd told me to drop in any time I had an evening I didn't know what to do with."

Marion raised her eyebrows.

"But, Peter, how did you come to know him? You've hardly spent a week here altogether—less, I believe."

Peter grinned a little sheepishly.

"I went to church on Christmas Day down in Clowance." He smiled at his friend's look of astonishment. "I was in the churchyard, looking to see if there were any Zabuloes, and thought I might as well," he went on, as casually as he could manage, "and he stopped to speak to me as we met at the church door, on my way out. He's a fine old fellow. An intelligent man, too."

"Well, this beats me," admitted Bill, still in a chaffing tone. He was not as sensitive to atmosphere as his wife.

"And while I'm at it, Bill," Peter's voice was now serious enough to make his friend turn to him, impressed, "I may as well make my excuses to you. I remember telling you one evening that I couldn't see how any clear-headed, intelligent man could do other than reject all religious belief as so much rubbish. I'll take that back."

"Peter! You don't mean——?"

"I mean more than I've just said. I'm prepared to admit that there is something in the religious idea which will bear examination. I used to think that it was mere supposition, without the slightest foundation on reason. I can see that there is more to it than that." He turned impulsively towards Marion. She, he felt, would more easily understand this half-way house at which he had arrived than would his friend Bill, with his utter absence of subtleties. "There was a most interesting man at the vicarage last night, a Jesuit. He had the clearest way of putting things, just the sort of common-sense, logical arguments to appeal to my type of mind. No sentimentalities, you understand, but a straightforward appeal to the reason. I must say I was impressed. I don't suppose his arguments were really so new, either, but

they seemed new to me, anyway. They set me thinking."

"A Jesuit?" said Bill doubtfully.

"Don't be an ass, Bill!" retorted Peter scornfully. "I didn't expect that kind of narrow-minded vulgarity from you!"

"Don't bully him," Marion smiled in amusement at the two men. "He was merely expressing a very natural doubt about the source of your arguments. But go on about this discussion."

"I can't bear that kind of cant," Peter said, with a grudging return to a calmer tone of voice. "And, in any case, this man might just as well have been a Quaker, last night. The Canon admitted quite openly that there wasn't a word in the whole argument that wouldn't have been accepted readily by the most bigoted of nonconformists. He even specified a Primitive Methodist called Mitchell, at Marhamchapel!"

Bill grinned.

"I know him," he chuckled delightedly.

"Anyway, there they were, the Canon and Père Anton, a couple of widely-read, well-informed men, utterly in agreement, perfectly prepared to admit their belief in things which I've always been inclined to think were only adhered to by ignorant country folk or superstitious old women. And yet there could be no doubt of their utter sincerity."

"My dear man, you'd never listen to me, but I've always told you that some of the greatest scholars and scientists were professed Christians. Kepler, Newton, have you never read the things they said about it?"

"Don't quote, for Heaven's sake, Bill, there's a good chap. You know what I think about quotations. If you choose them well enough you can make out that the Archbishop of Canterbury is a Roman Catholic, I dare say. And, anyway, citing scientists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries isn't any too convincing."

"Well," insisted Bill vehemently, "if you want a

more modern example, Pasteur was a Catholic, and if you're a scientist I should say it was far more difficult to be a Catholic than a Protestant! "

"All right, let's admit that there have been great scientists who have been Christians. I'm not trying to dispute it. Haven't I just told you that I take back what I said to you before about it? But do you know, Marion, I had another experience, last night, which impressed me even more than all Père Anton's arguments—and that's saying a good deal! "

She gave him all her attention as he told them of the motor accident and its sequence, her grave eyes following the play of expression on his mobile face.

"I wish you could have heard him! He was quite ready, not the least afraid, and I'm certain he thought that death was very near. He was so certain that death was not the end, so perfectly assured that it was just a question of going to join his dear old wife who'd gone on before him, that I think he'd almost have welcomed it! I've never imagined anything so utterly beautiful. I'm not ashamed to say that my eyes were not perfectly dry at that moment."

His gaze was far away, over the meadow, down across the river to the calm hills on the other side. Marion smiled softly, watching him in silence. Then he turned to her impulsively

"Marion, do you and Bill feel as certain as that? " he asked with almost passionate earnestness.

"Yes, Peter," she said, still smiling.

CHAPTER XII

"NANCECULLOM'S ZACKY"

GOOD FRIDAY night, in the villages round Zabuloe, was associated with the great event of the history of the Zabuloes, the murder of the Protestant eldest son by his Catholic wife. It was always said that on special occasions the ghost of the murdered man could be seen at a certain spot, just where the Zabuloe estate touched the Trewint lower fields, as they were usually called, for it was there that the murder had taken place, just when the victim had left his father's estate in flight, having quarrelled too bitterly ever to be reconciled, over his conversion to the Protestant religion.

The legend had it that this Peter, son of his father, another Peter Zabuloe, had been unhappy in his marriage, that his wife dearly loved her husband's cousin, Paul, who was to succeed to the estates after Peter, her husband, had been chased from the house by his father. Mistress Clowance was an ardent Catholic at the time, so they said, but when, having married Paul after a very short widowhood, Paul in his turn went over to the Protestant faith, she had not hesitated to follow her new husband. Not so much the indignation at Peter's apostasy as the desire to be free had brought about the murder. And Mistress Clowance also haunted the spot where her crime had been committed.

The ghosts, it was said, preferred a misty night for their appearances. They were not the usual type to be distinguished by white sheets and clanking irons, but two

figures in dark clothing, remarkable for their white faces and their unusual height.

The Cornish country folk are rather short and stocky in build, and the Zabuloes had always been remarkable for their great height. Clowance, indeed, was unusually small for her race, and it was always said that in that alone did she take after her mother, a diminutive person whom her father had found "on his soldiering," as the country folk described it, and whose frail health had sadly jeopardised the life of her daughter, whose arrival, indeed, had cost the mother her own life, and folk were almost inclined to pity her because she fell so far short of the usual standard for Zabuloe women.

The ghosts were therefore easily recognisable by that characteristic alone, and the whole neighbourhood was vaguely proud of them, though none cared to go anywhere in the neighbourhood of the lower Trewint fields on Good Friday evening after sundown.

It had been a glorious day, and one of the few general holidays that the farmers were inclined to recognise. Beyond such necessary tasks as feeding the poultry and cattle, no one worked that day. It was spent in visits to one's relatives, gossip, and, for the young people, "walking out."

Benny Cowling's accident had provided a new and much appreciated topic of conversation, and the rumour that the new Squire was in some way mixed up with it made it far more worth talking about. Old Benny himself had so many people to inquire about him that Zillah had finished by being quite firm and forbidding anyone but his own relations to visit him, and near relatives at that.

"Traapsing in an' aout o' the haouse, mornin' noon an' night! No peace in the plaace!"

But there was another exception. Bart Nancecullom had attached to him a poor witless lad who could find no one else in the village who was prepared to employ him. Bart was patience itself with Zacky, as he was called, and

the humble creature followed him around like a dog, did as he was told to the letter if once he could be made to understand, and when in his company seemed to achieve more sense than at any other time of his life. "Nancecullom's Zacky" he had come to be called, and he was proud of the name.

Zacky adored old Benny. The old man seemed to have the same faculty for making the poor brain understand what was wanted of it, and his unfailing kindness had attached the pitiful idiot's grateful devotion.

When he heard of the accident, Bart had been down at once to Trewint, well knowing how much extra work must be involved in the nursing of the old man, and wishing, as unobtrusively as possible, to help to lighten the burden. Zillah was not a woman to admit that such a thing could not be easily taken in her stride. But Zacky could wait on old Benny without that uncompromising woman realising that she was in fact being helped. It was natural that Zacky should want to do what he could for his favourite.

So the matter was tactfully and satisfactorily arranged, and throughout the day Zacky ran up and down stairs, fetching and carrying food, drinks, anything that was wanted for the invalid, running errands, taking messages, sitting with the old man when he slept, ready to fetch Zillah or Clowance at a moment's notice, should they be wanted.

But in the feeble intellect there were certain prejudices which could not be got rid of. Zacky would only take his meals at the Nancecullom farm. Nowhere else would he eat or drink a mouthful. Nor would he sleep away from Bart. Ever since the young farmer had taken him away from the miserable cottage where he had been maltreated by his grandmother—he had been an unwanted illegitimate child, and his mother had died in giving him birth—he had first slept in Bart's room, and then in the tiny room leading off it. Nothing would persuade him to spend a night anywhere else.

So, although he had tended the old man all through the day, he had come back to the farm for his meals, and Bart knew well enough that he would reappear late that evening to slip through his room into his own little den.

Bart himself had had a full day. Cousins down from the county had visited the farm, and he had been obliged to fetch them in the morning from the train, entertain them for long, weary hours, and take them back to Bodmin in the evening. He had made an early excuse, readily accepted by his father, to go to his room, and lay idly dreaming in his bed, waiting for Zacky's return before letting himself drop finally off to sleep.

Involuntarily his thoughts went back to his conversation with Clowance. He had not yet got to the back of the mystery about those Trewint fields on which his father had so suddenly set his heart. The thing worried him, as did all problems that he could not reasonably explain to his satisfaction, and this, touching Clowance as it did, was all the more tantalising.

But the long day in the open air had had its effect. It was with a start that he awoke to find Zacky standing beside him, trembling with fright, his teeth chattering in his head, utterly unable to control himself.

He sat up.

There was a full moon, but a thin haze hung close to the earth, and the light which came in at his bedroom window was unearthly enough, as it poured down on to the grotesque figure of the poor terrified idiot, his eyes staring and bright, his lips hanging loose, his hair all on end, his hands for ever wringing together, as he moaned low, gibbering, incomprehensible sentences every now and then.

"Pull yourself together, Zacky," said Bart sharply, but putting an arm round the thin shaking shoulders to take away from the harshness of his words. "Tell me what's the matter. Why are you back so late? Is anything wrong with old Benny?"

Zacky made a great effort.

"No!" he shook his head. "Benny's all right."

"Then what is it? Why are you so late?" Bart asked again, a little impatiently. Zacky had sometimes had fits of panic as a child, but not for some years, since the fear of his grandmother had left him, and an utter confidence in his protector had taken its place. Surely he was not going to begin those attacks again now? "Tell me, what's the matter?"

But the poor creature only continued to moan and shake.

Finally Bart got out of bed and went to his cupboard. He took out a flask and poured out a small dose of brandy.

"Drink this," he insisted. Zacky hated spirits or even beer—sad reminders of his grandmother—but brandy had always an immediate effect on him. His teeth chattered on the edge of the glass, but at last he obediently got it down with much choking and spluttering.

The young farmer watched him for a second or two, saw him gradually calm down, the trembling become less violent, and then took him by the shoulders and shook him gently.

"Now, Zacky. No more nonsense. What's been frightening you?"

Another spasm of shuddering swept over the poor idiot, and he ran to the window, drawing the blinds to shut out the moonlight. Bart watched him, wondering. Zacky generally loved the moonlight.

"Zacky afraad of moon! Bad!" a hoarse, husky voice sounded through the chattering teeth.

"Bad? Why?"

"Moon an' mist! Daown in Trewint fields! Zacky 'fraad!"

"Trewint fields?" Bart looked at the vacant face sharply. That would, of course, be his quickest route back from Trewint to the farm. "What did you see there?"

"Moon an' mist an' Zabuloe ghoasts!"

Zabuloe ghosts? Zacky, out of all the village, had

always been free from any fear of the Zabuloe ghosts. He had never feared to go down in the haunted fields after sundown, not even on Good Friday night. He had never claimed to have seen the dread figures, although more than once he had chanced to be in the region when others had sworn that the murdered man and his murderess had walked some misty night.

Bart himself, naturally, had no belief whatever in the phantoms. He was of a generation that does not easily admit the supernatural in any form. Besides, he was a sceptic even of religion, and laughed at the superstitions which still clung to the remote country-side in which he lived. Ghosts, witches, the evil eye, all were rejected summarily by his robust common sense.

Trewint fields! His mind went back immediately to the thoughts which had been occupying his mind when he had dropped off to sleep. That he must search for an explanation of Zacky's fear elsewhere than in the traditional Zabuloe ghosts never seemed to him anything other than obvious for a single moment.

"Where did you see them?" he asked the now less terrified creature. The telling of his fear seemed to have lessened it.

"Trewint lower fields. All ovver. Two. Zacky zeed two."

"All over the fields, Zacky?"

Tradition had it that the ghosts wandered along the road that bordered the fields, but never penetrated into the fields themselves. That was not Zabuloe ground.

"All ovver!" assented the boy eagerly.

Bart hesitated a minute. Might there not be some danger to Clowance in all this?

"Zacky, will you come with me and show me where you saw them?"

His mind was moving quickly. If he went down with his father and Zacky, they would seem to be three, more than a match for two men. The intruders would probably take to their heels, not dreaming that there would be

only one solid man among their adversaries, the other two being an old man and an idiot.

"Zacky go, with Bart. With Bart, Zacky not 'fraad."

With touching confidence he looked up at the young farmer, his fright suddenly leaving him.

"Good; then wait a moment while I put a few clothes on. And you might just go along and see if my father is awake. If he is, tell him I want him to dress at once. If he isn't, come back and tell me, and I'll go and wake him."

Zacky nodded eagerly. His fright had gone and he was all eagerness for an expedition on which he was to help his beloved Bart. He would show Bart where the ghosts had been. All along the corridor to the older Nancecullom's bedroom he chattered to himself, little senseless sentences, laughing low, chuckling to himself in his excitement. He knocked at the half-open door, as he had been taught to do, but there was no answer. He listened intently. His hearing was particularly keen. There was no sound of breathing. He knocked again. Then, stepping lightly, he went inside the door, glanced hastily round the room, nodded his head, and ran back down the corridor.

"Asleep?" asked Bart as the grotesque figure appeared again in the doorway.

"Not aslaap. Not there!" was the delighted announcement.

"Not there?" Bart's brows met over his eyes in a sudden frown. "*Not there*, did you say?"

"Not there!"

So that was the explanation of the ghosts! His father! And what could he want in the lower Trewint fields at midnight? He remembered, now, being a little surprised at the willingness with which his father had accepted his decision to go early to bed. As a rule the old man, who loved to sit late over his dying fire, hated to be left alone, and begged his son to humour him.

This was why, to-night, he'd been so willing to see his son disappear!

Midnight, and on Good Friday night! Just the one day in all the year when he was most certain to find no one about in that particular region. Zacky had spoken of two figures. The second must be a stranger, for no man of the district would dare to go to those fields to-night of all nights.

"Come, Zacky!" The idiot took his hand, as a child might have done. "Quickly, now. We've no time to waste. These ghosts may be gone soon."

There was no need for special precautions in the house, but once they were outside the farm premises Bart suddenly realised the danger of taking Zacky with him. It was so difficult to make him understand things, and certainly he would fail entirely to comprehend the necessity for saying nothing about this midnight expedition, especially when he realised old Matthew Nancecullom's part in it. There was now no need to impress the intruders with exaggerated ideas as to their numbers. His whole endeavour would be to find out what his father was doing and get back to the farm again without it ever having been discovered that he had left his bed. For that purpose one was better than two, in any case, quite apart from the need of keeping from Zacky any knowledge of its real significance.

He stopped suddenly at the gate to the first field.

"You go back now," he said persuasively to his companion. "You need a good sleep. To-morrow you must go and take care of Benny again, you know. I know my way."

The dim intelligence behind those vague eyes tried to understand for a second or two, recognised the look of command in Bart's expression, and, obediently, like a well-trained dog he trotted back to the farm.

Bart sighed deeply. The first difficulty was over. To-morrow he'd have to make the poor creature understand that he mustn't say a word about his adventure,

or about the old farmer's absence from his bed. The latter would be easy enough. It hadn't seemed to strike Zacky as unusual. He had probably not realised the hour, and imagined that Matthew Nancecullom was still dozing over the fire in the sitting-room.

Creeping along the hedges, Bart made his way by the most roundabout route to the Trewint fields. At any moment now his father might be on his way back. It was essential not to be discovered. He reached the lane which bordered the fields, the lane which was said to be haunted by the Zabuloe ghosts, without hearing or seeing anything unusual, but just as he had decided to venture into the fields themselves he made his first discovery.

A motor-bicycle.

It stood against the hedge, almost covered in the thick grass, for Easter fell late that year, and a damp spring followed by warm weather had set the vegetation sprouting. Had he not been on the look-out he might never have seen it, quite apart from the extreme unlikeliness of anyone coming that way on that particular night. He noted its number, for future reference. It was a Triumph. There was no Triumph in any of the three Zabuloe villages, that he knew well. A good machine, and very well kept.

He had just time to hide himself by lying down in the lush grass of the ditch that ran under the bank. Voices, in hoarse undertones, came across the dark. He must have missed the sound of their footsteps, intent on examining the motor-cycle, though, in the meadow grass, they could not have made much noise.

"That's understood, then." It was his father's voice. "Not one word about this, eh?"

"You c'n trust me, maaster," the other chuckled. "Never been called a chatterer yet."

"And you know you won't be a loser if you hold your tongue, too!"

"Knows which side my bread's buttered!"

"Yes. Well, don't you forget it, my man. The girl

can't pay you the money, I can, remember that. And we don't know yet just what it may all mean."

"Aw, ess, we do an' all! Ted'n the furst taim I seed a field dowsed aout, maaster, an' I c'n tell what et do maan w'en little stick won' staay up, no matter haow I d'pull et, all ovver the field, two fields and three fields, too! There ed'n no two waays o' thenkin' 'baout w'at that do maan!"

"Well, I only hope you're right, that's all. It'll mean a fine thing for you, my man, if what you tell me is true. I shan't forget you. Remember that."

"An' I wouldn' let' ee, maaster!" The chuckle was insolent. Bart could well imagine the look that must accompany it. "I d'knew w'at I d'knew."

"Very good. And now get off. It's well after midnight"

"Aafter taim w'en goasties do walk, eh, maaster? Aw, I d'understaand!"

There was a click as the latch of the field gate swung into place, a rustle as the motor-bicycle was wheeled out of the grasses into the road, a stutter of a starting engine, and then a cheery "Good naight" followed by a nervous "Hush" from the other side of the hedge

The motor-cycle was off.

Bart waited a second or two, until he thought that his father was far enough away not to hear him move, and then leapt to his feet and ran the whole way back to the farm. He knew he could beat his father's deliberate steps, even if the old man hurried, which his son did not expect. A night's work like that he had just accomplished tends to set a man thinking, and his father always said he thought better when walking. He'd take his time, going back, sure that he had not been heard or seen.

He was undressed and in his bed again before he heard the stealthy footfalls of the old man creeping up the stairs and along the corridor. They paused for an instant at his door. Bart could hear the hard breathing.

Matthew Nancecullom always found those stairs too steep for comfort. But all was quiet within, and the stockinged feet went on.

Bart lay awake, looking at the moon.

What was he to do ?

CHAPTER XIII

BART AND THE SQUIRE

BART lay awake all night long.

His problem seemed to become more difficult with each long hour. He tried to look at it from both sides, that of loyalty to his father and that of loyalty to Clowance. But whatever he did he could not get away from the aspect of plain honesty. How was he to act so as to satisfy all three?

To tell Clowance what he had discovered, to let her know how his father had acted during the night, was to brand Matthew Nancecullom as a thief in intention. He could see, all too well, how that ingenious brain had worked. The first idea must have been vague. The farmer had long said that he had some gifts as a "dowser." He must by some accident have been led to try "dowsing" those fields, and then, when old Lady Zabuloe had been in need of money, he had risked his two thousand pounds, thinking to get it back by buying those fields, some day, when the Zabuloe estate should be in urgent need of money and be prepared to sell without too much investigation of his reasons for buying.

Then must have come the stage when—conscience, perhaps, saying its word—he had hoped to put all right by encouraging a match between his son and the heiress. That would have been simplest of all, and most satisfactory, since Bart knew well enough what depth of pride there lay in his father's heart, what fund of ambition. The gradual ruin of the Zabuloe estate, the poverty in

which Clowance lived at the Manor, must have encouraged his belief that she might come at last to think the match with the farmer's son not too great a price to pay for saving her home. He must have calculated that it would be easy, with the secret of the riches hidden in those fields in his possession, to persuade the banks to give him the credit necessary for taking up the mortgage when the time should come. If Bart had already married the heiress, so much the better. The discovery of the ore would be able to come quite naturally, and the girl buy back her heritage from him. It would matter little, then, since all would go to his son in the end.

The sale of Zabuloe Manor must have come as a great blow to all his plans. Clowance was now independent. True, she had lost the Manor, but nothing he could do would make it seem likely that he could give it back to her. What inducement had he now to make her marry his son? There was no longer any hope of gaining these hidden riches by fair means. He must stoop to fraud.

And here again the sale of the Manor was a sad hindrance to his plans. It had left Clowance with money in hand. If she chose she could pay him back his two thousand pounds at once, and refuse to sell the fields. His one hope had been, of course, to persuade her that they were of little or no value to her, so that she might think it more to her advantage to cede them to him rather than unnecessarily diminish her capital. And then, once the sale concluded, he would, by the most natural accident, make his dramatic discovery!

And if Clowance refused to sell?

It was at this point in his arguments that Bart paused. If Clowance refused to sell, he could leave things as they stood, forbear to disclose his father's plot, leave the hidden wealth still a secret. That Matthew Nancecullom would never breathe a word of it, so long as he held the faintest hope of ever acquiring it for himself, he had not the smallest doubt.

Everything would go on as it was. He would harm neither his father nor the girl he loved.

But was he quite honest with himself?

Lying there in the thin light of earliest dawn, he saw his own motives very clearly. Clowance as the mistress of the Manor and Clowance as the farmer of Trewint were two very different people. To the girl at Trewint he could offer a thousand and one small services. There was always a good reason for a visit to the farm, a counsel to give. He was in and out almost every day. She would get used to him in time. He seemed to be more in her world, or she in his. The distance between them tended to disappear. Perhaps, one day, she might see him in a different light. Perhaps . . .

But Clowance at the Manor was out of reach. His father might try to deceive himself, but Bart saw clearly enough that his place could never be at Zabuloe Manor. When she had lived there he had hardly seen the girl except by accident, in the villages.

Must he give her, with his own hands, the means to get back to the Manor? Must it be he who threw away his last chance of happiness?

And must he brand his own father as a dishonest man, ready to profit by this defenceless girl's ignorance, to rob her of thousands of pounds of her birthright?

He tossed in his bed, turning the arguments over and over in vain. There seemed no solution to his problem.

At last, when the stir in the farmyard told him that the day had begun for the rest of the world, he got up, weary and discouraged. He was no nearer a solution. All he had decided was that for the moment he need not act. He would see what his father intended to do, and the old man would certainly do nothing until after Easter. He would need time to make up his mind, for one thing, and by all tradition, Easter is no time to do business.

He found time before going downstairs to warn Zacky not to say a word about his adventures of the night.

"There were no ghosts in the Trewint fields when I got there, Zacky," he assured him. "Don't you say a word about it. They'll all laugh at you. You've always said there were no ghosts. You mustn't let them know that *you* were afraid, too!"

The poor creature nodded his head sagely. That simple type of argument appealed to him.

"Zacky not saay a word," he agreed, his twisted finger on his mouth.

"That's right! And now you go off as soon as you've had your breakfast, to see what you can do for Benny Cowling."

With a delighted grin he went shambling away. Bart watched him in silence. How simple life was, after all, for that poor being! Obedience, nothing else was required of him, and he found it such an easy path. But he remembered the little bundle of misery, bruised, perpetually trembling with fear, half starved, that he had rescued from that wretched hovel outside Marham-chapel. And he shrugged his broad shoulders. And yet people believed in a God of Love!

"You look tired, Dad," he said, as he sat down opposite his father at the breakfast-table and began pouring out the thick black tea that the old man loved. "Had a bad night?"

A surly grunt answered him.

"Something worrying you?"

Keen eyes looked up at him from under bushy brows.

"You don't look any too grand yourself." The farmer paused a moment, examining his son's expression. "Didn't you sleep, either?"

"Not particularly well."

"Eh? How's that?" the words were rapped out. "You went to bed early enough."

"Oh, yes! I slept at first, but Zacky woke me, when he came in from Trewint. He was very late and he was in a terrible state of fright. Said he'd seen the Zabuloe ghosts!"

To his surprise the farmer laughed gaily.

"Zacky? Zacky saw the Zabuloe ghosts? Well, that'll teach him not to go round there another night "

"But, Dad," he persisted, "don't you think it rather odd? Zacky's always said there *were* no ghosts. He's never been afraid to go by that way at night."

But the old man went on chuckling

"We'll have *you* believing in them yet, son," he suggested delightedly. "Zabuloe ghosts. Well, well! I never thought to hear you taking 'em seriously! No, my boy, there was a lot of mist last night. A poor fool like Zacky 'll see anything in the mist and the moonlight. Best not let him go that way again. Bad for the nerves, a fright like that, and *his* are none too solid at the best of times! "

Bart said no more. He'd been mad to talk about it, but had been unable to resist the temptation to see how his father would react. Clearly the old man had simply congratulated himself on having chosen just that night for his expedition. He must have reckoned on those ghosts, both to keep curious folk away and to explain away his own appearance, should he by unlucky chance have been seen. Crafty old fellow! It was impossible not to have a sneaking admiration for him, in spite of all.

He could not keep away from Trewint.

The very knowledge that he held in his hands the means to put Clowance once more out of his reach seemed to push him to be with her whenever he could. This time the old invalid was a good excuse. It was natural that he should call for news of Benny Cowling, and it would be equally natural that he should stay for a chat with Clowance. Zillah's ideas of hospitality would not let him go without being offered that traditional "'erby beer" with a slice of saffron cake, "seedy" cake, or the "'eavy caake" for which she was renowned.

That visit was to have its effect on his attitude towards his haunting problem.

He was to meet the Squire, as Peter Zabuloe was now generally called.

Peter had hesitated considerably before deciding to go down and see his "victim." He had been amused to recognise this new attitude in himself. Would he three months ago have bothered to go and see an old man whom he had already bothered to befriend, although in no way responsible for the accident? Where was this new humanity coming from? Honest with himself, he examined his motives closely to see whether there was not hidden in them the desire to see how Clowance Zabuloe would treat him when he arrived, and though he had to admit that he most certainly was curious on that point, yet he must recognise that even if Clowance were not to be at the house he should still want to visit the old man.

Bill and Marion Lanteglos had the surprise of their lives that morning when Peter asked casually what would be the cost of building and equipping a cottage hospital.

"It's rather a disgrace, you know," he finished, almost defiantly in answer to the astonishment on their faces, "that there should be nothing of the sort in this whole neighbourhood. All these people, if they have the bad luck to be ill, have to go to Bodmin, miles from their friends and families. And the only doctor for miles around is that old dodderer you introduced me to yesterday, Marion."

"I entirely agree with you, Peter," Marion had quickly hidden her surprise, and was all sympathy with his ideas. "Bill would have to look it up, but I imagine that the whole thing might be done for, say, three thousand pounds."

"With an operating theatre?" asked Peter anxiously.

"Well, hardly that," agreed Bill; "but, I say, I never expected this sort of thing from you."

Peter flushed hotly, vaguely uncomfortable.

"Well, I may as well do something for these people, I suppose. After all, they seem to think of me as a sort of feudal chief. It's almost embarrassing. Of course, the whole place has been too poor for some time to do much, but I noticed that the Canon several times spoke of what past squires had done for this and that village. It seems to be expected of one, somehow."

"All power to your elbow!" exclaimed the irrepressible Bill, "I always told you . . ."

But on a glance from his wife he lapsed into silence. Peter had noticed the looks which had passed between them and smiled.

"It's all right, Marion," he assured her. "I'm as surprised at myself as Bill is at me. It's something in the air, I suppose. They expect things of one, and one instinctively lives up to their idea of what one should be. Odd. And now, can you think of anything on earth that I can take to my old 'victim'?"—he had told them the story of Clowance's reception of him as a good joke—"which won't risk getting me into Zillah's black books? I'm going down to see him this morning, and I don't like to go empty-handed."

In the end he took a dressing-jacket, a pleasant garment in a fairly heavy cashmere with silk froggings which he had chosen for himself with great care at a fashionable man's shop in St. James's Street just before coming down, to replace the thick one he had been wearing all the winter. It would be too big for the frail old man, but Marion assured him that it was sure to be welcomed.

He walked down to Trewint by the other drive which led from the opposite side of the terrace from that by which he usually went to Clowance village. Trewint was off the principal road to Bodmin, so that this other drive was seldom used. All among the trees grew primroses and daffodils on either side in such profusion that he felt tempted to gather a few to offer with his jacket, but the idea of himself picking flowers struck him

as somehow vaguely ridiculous, and he decided against it. He had not got to that yet !

Trewint looked charming in the morning sunlight, gay and trim, with its front path bordered with daffodils. He was thankful of his decision not to bring any coals to Newcastle. The front step was neatly scrubbed and bathbricked. This was a pleasant house to live in, he felt sure, and it comforted him to know that in turning that girl out of the Manor he had not banished her into some red-brick villa.

And his conscience, a sensitive plant in these days, reminded him that it was no fault of his that she had Trewint to harbour her. On that day when he had bought Zabuloe he would have thoughtlessly taken Trewint with the rest.

"Would you ask Miss Zabuloe whether she will allow me to see Benny Cowling for a little while ?" he asked Adam Richards, when the old servant had greeted him cordially.

The feud, thought Peter, did not spread to the whole household !

"Miss Clowance's aout, zur," he was informed, "but she ded saay you was to go up and zee Benny if so be as you was to come."

"Thank you. Shall I go straight up ? I remember my way."

"As you will, zur," beamed Adam. "Benny'll be fine an' praud to zee 'ee, zur."

"Fine an' praud," he was ! And when he had seen his new coat and learned that it had been bought for the Squire himself, his joy knew no bounds. Zacky, who at first had been too shy and awed to do anything but gibber after Peter's arrival, gradually calmed down again and sat stroking the silk froggings in smiling delight.

"I be graand," Benny assured Peter. "Doctor be so plaazed with et all. Model paashent, he sez I be !"

"Well, with all this good nursing, you'll soon be well, I can see."

It was so difficult to find something original to say!

"Waay I d'zee et ez this. The Lord weren't ready fur me, not yet, so He ded zend yew, Zur Peter, to zee I wuz brought back saafe. Doctor, he tells me as ef I hadn't bin brought back raight away 'tother naight, I'd just've daied. Exposure, he zed. So, you zee, Zur Peter, 'twas you as saaved my laife!"

Peter did his best to wave away the explanation and the gratitude, but the old man was insistent. He owed his life to the Squire, and thankful he was. That was the end of it. It was a relief when the visit was at an end, for the doctor arrived, and Peter was able to make that his excuse for disappearing, after promising to come again another day.

"Wonderful old chap," the doctor told him, as he paused a moment outside the door before going downstairs, in order to get the doctor's confirmation of the good report. "I should say he's going to mend as well as anyone. And he's getting fine nursing here."

"Pity there's no hospital anywhere around," remarked Peter. The idea of that hospital kept running in his head that morning. "These people ought not to have to go to Bodmin, or rely on Good Samaritans like Miss Zabuloe."

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

"Millionaires are rare birds," he said with a smile, "and even then you can't easily get them to interest themselves in a tiny place, right off the map, like Trewint village."

"How much would it take to build and equip one big enough to serve the three Zabuloe villages?"

The doctor shot a keen glance at Peter. Then he pursed his lips an instant.

"It needn't be big, you know," he said, still watching

Peter's expression out of the corner of his eye. "It's a healthy neighbourhood. If you're at all interested, I'll look into it, and let you know."

"I wish you would. And now I mustn't keep you from your patient."

Peter found Adam waiting for him in the hall at the foot of the stairs.

"Miss Clowance is back, now, zur, an' she aasks ef you'd be so good as to step into the drawing-room to speak to her a moment before you go."

Peter hesitated. For a moment he thought of refusing. The girl might have some other insolent remark ready for him, a refusal to allow him to see Benny again; even if she was now ready to acknowledge her mistake it would be a difficult interview.

"It's this waay, zur," Adam reminded him.

And Peter docilely followed him into the room where he had seen Clowance when he had brought Benny to her house.

This time he had a different welcome.

He noticed with relief that they were not alone. A tall, almost handsome young man stood on the other side of the little table from which Clowance was dispensing hospitality. Who was he, he wondered, with a twinge of unexplainable annoyance at seeing the obviously friendly terms on which this stranger stood with his hostess.

Clowance, however, had come forward with outstretched hand as soon as Adam had opened the door to show him in.

"I asked you to spare me a minute, Sir Peter"—so she knew—"to apologise to you for my behaviour the other night. I know it was really unpardonable, but I'm so devoted to old Benny, and it *did* seem such an obvious explanation of the situation, when it was you who had brought him here!"

Peter could not resist an easy retort, but his smile took all hint of ill-feeling from his sally.

"And you *do* so hate my Bentley."

For a second it looked as if the girl were about to resent the remark. Then the corners of her mouth twitched suspiciously, and a delightful smile broke out on her face.

It was the first time that he had seen her smile. It had been his fate to meet her when she was angry, sad, contemptuous, anything but the joyous, mischievous girl who now looked at him out of eyes which, if he had realised it, were ridiculously like his own, deep-set and blue, fringed with thick black curling lashes.

Bart realised it. He stood there, neglected, taking in the picture they represented. This man was her own kind, he was able to make with her the little jokes he would never dare, even if he could think of them! Even these few words that they had exchanged, their whole attitude towards one another, put him effectively in his place.

"The car?" she was answering, gaily, with a little laugh. "Oh, that's much better now! I can even admire it, now. It's a beauty."

"I'm rather in love with her myself," admitted Peter, "and I'm willing to admit that on a good wide road, where I can see well ahead of me, I *do* let her out and I quite understand about the other night. It's not worth thinking about. And now that you don't feel so angry with me, *isn't* there anything that I could do to help with old Benny? An invalid makes so much extra work in a house."

It was then that, somewhat belatedly, Clowance remembered the presence of Bart.

"Thank you," she said, shaking her head. "Bart, but I believe you don't know Mr. Nancecullom, do you? Bart, this is Sir Peter Zabuloe." She watched the two men shake hands gravely. "Mr. Nancecullom has been more than kind, Sir Peter, and given us the most acceptable kind of help in lending us Zacky. You'll have seen

him upstairs. He's devoted to Benny, and my faithful Zillah doesn't resent his coming, both very great points, I assure you."

Peter sighed.

"Well, if you won't let me help," he began.

"Please, don't take it like that! There simply isn't anything more to be done. Benny is no trouble and Zacky does all the running about, thanks to Mr. Nancecullom."

Bart stood awkwardly, first on one foot then on the other. Even Clowance's smiles did not make him feel that he had his place with these two. He was tolerated. They were at their ease together. He was of another kind. He joined in the conversation to the best of his ability, but he was never a part of it.

At last, whether out of malice or by mere chance, he could not decide when he came to think of it afterwards, he broke up that frail bond which seemed to be uniting these two of the same race.

Peter had been talking of Trewint and admiring the charm of the old homestead.

"I hear that you've done great things up at the Manor," Bart put in casually. "Electric light, central heating, everything that is most modern." He noticed the strained look on the girl's face, but did not stop. "Turned a ruin into a palace, by all accounts, and a wilderness into a garden."

"My two friends have worked marvels," answered Peter, diffidently, watching the expression on Clowance's face. "I suppose you wouldn't care to come in and see it some time?"

"I would indeed!" exclaimed Bart, almost boisterously.

"And—dare I ask you, Miss Zabuloe?"

As soon as he had said the words he regretted them. He cursed the young farmer at his side who had made them so inevitable. Tactless creature!—or had it been intentional?

"No," said Clowance coldly. "I don't think I should care to come, thank you."

Peter realised that he could do no good by staying on, and took his leave. That young fool! Just when things were going so well! His cousin. What a charmer she could be when she wanted! He smiled to himself as he went down the garden path. Well, things hadn't ended too badly, after all. She had come to the door with him, and he still remembered the smile on her lips as she had left him.

Bart, on the other hand, was ill-pleased with his handiwork. Clowance, when she came back from seeing the Squire off the premises, had been in a different mood, a mood he could not understand. She did not, as he had hoped, go back to her old frank manner, the manner she always used with him. She was thoughtful, almost morose.

"Miss Clowance," he burst out at last, as if eager at all costs to change the atmosphere by changing the subject, "has my father been to you again about those fields?"

"Those fields?" her mind seemed suddenly to come back from far away. "Oh, Trewint lower fields! No. He hasn't been here for a long time now. Have you found out any more?"

"Well, not exactly." Bart hesitated, unhappily. "I just wondered. Tell me, if he should ask you again, should you sell them?"

This time Clowance's interest and a certain curiosity were aroused. She looked at him keenly.

"I don't think so," she said slowly, wondering at his insistence. "What should you advise?"

Bart flushed suddenly. His advice? That was a hard one, when he hadn't made up his mind about what he ought to do!

"I must think it over," he said lamely. "I'll have a talk with Mason."

"Bart," said the girl, putting a hand on his arm,

"what is it? Do you *want* me to sell those fields to your father for some reason? If so, don't you think you had better tell me all about it?"

"*Want* you to sell them to Dad?" he drew back at once, almost wrenching his arm away. "I never said anything about that. You don't need the money, do you? I just wanted to know."

Once outside of the house, his leave taken in a way which had made Clowance sit still wondering what was at the bottom of his odd behaviour, Bart strode across the fields in a turmoil of indecision.

He was jealous, insanely jealous of that handsome giant who called himself Peter Zabuloe, *Sir* Peter Zabuloe! He might as well admit the fact. He hated the sight of the fellow, with his easy manners, his beautifully-cut clothes, his very shoes which made his own look like the cheap things they were. In that man's presence he felt inferior, common. He knew that he had not had the education of that young Squire, he had no social "finish." He knew how his awkward manners, his roughened accent, his unkempt hands must appear beside that man, and, although he had never really had any hope of being accepted by Clowance Zabuloe, the knowledge that where he could not hope this other might be almost certain to win, maddened him. Already he could see that the first animosity, due to the purchase of the Manor, had almost died down. He had watched those two, of the same caste, the same race, live those few moments in a growing harmony which he, in his malice—or his tactlessness—had broken for the moment.

What should he do?

He knew well enough what obscure instinct had forced him to speak to her of those fields. If she were to know of those riches awaiting her under their surface she would buy back her Manor. It was not too late. She had not yet forgotten that this man had turned her out of her home. She had not yet forgiven him. She had not yet realised that there might be another way to return to live

at Zabuloe Manor. In a little while all that would be changed.

Already the enemies had almost become friends. It would need so little for the friends to become lovers. His bitter jealousy ate into his heart. They would make a handsome couple, those two distant cousins, the two survivors of two lines of the ancient house of Zabuloe.

But if he told her about the fields? He would surely lose her, but not to that man.

And then what of his father?

CHAPTER XIV

E A S T E R D A Y

PETER woke up in the early morning to the sound of the bells.

Easter Day ! “ Christ is Risen ! ”

The full peal rang out into the clear air, the most glorious music on earth reaching, it seemed to Peter, straight up into Heaven in a very pæan of thanksgiving and rejoicing.

It was his mood, these days, to let his mind welcome vestiges of all that he had heard in his childhood when faith had scarcely been a conscious thing, but a vague atmosphere. His father had been a singularly inarticulate man in all matters which touched his heart. Even his deep affection for his son had been silent. His religion might have been taken as a mere matter of routine to any who had not known the man closely.

Easter Day. “ Christ is Risen ! ”

He could remember his father, one Easter morning, fetching him in from the garden to get ready to accompany him to church. The very peals of the bells brought back the scene with an intensity and vividness that were almost painful to him now. He could see the small boy, busy sailing his toy yacht on the pond in the garden, protesting at having to leave his play to go to church. And his father's quiet remonstrance : “ Peter, it's Easter Day ! ” And the solemn little procession had made its way to the village church, to the sound of the bells.

That morning he went to Trewint Church, in memory of that little boy and his father.

He had chosen Trewint because it was from that church that the bells had pealed so merrily, and he had hoped that Clowance might also be there. The three Zabuloe villages, he had been told, could only manage one really competent team of ringers. The peal which it was usual to ring on Easter Day was a complicated one, and it was the custom, and had been for some twenty years or so, that the two churches who could boast a full peal, Trewint and Clowance, should take it in turns to have the peal rung on their bells. This Easter it was the turn of Trewint.

But he was doomed to disappointment. Not only was Clowance not at the church, but the building was almost empty, even on that morning. And as the service proceeded he was not surprised. He understood, now, the words of the old Canon in speaking of Mr Nanslowe: "He's emptying his church—and filling mine!"

Peter had more than once attended a service in a Roman Catholic church. To him it made a certain artistic and almost emotional appeal, the beauty of the ceremony, the feeling that there were centuries of tradition behind the complicated ritual, but though in the service which Mr Nanslowe—or Father Nanslowe, as he preferred to be called—conducted in Trewint Church he could almost recognise the forms of the Roman Catholic Mass, something seemed to be lacking, something wrong. Perhaps it was the empty church, perhaps the thin, reedy voice of the clergyman, but, somehow, the whole service was alien and cold.

The sermon, a learned *exposé* on the facts of Christ's resurrection from the dead and its meaning for mankind, struck no answering chord in Peter's mind, left his heart untouched, and he left the church at the conclusion of the service with a feeling of relief. If that was religion, that cold meaningless ceremonial, he was as far as ever from accepting it.

The sunshine, the smiling faces which greeted him in the village, put him in a better mood. He watched with no little interest the little crowd which had gathered round the somewhat bleak and commonplace building which announced itself to be the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel by a black-lettered stone above the main doorway. The emptiness of the church must not be taken to mean that Trewint village was less religiously-minded than Clowance village had shown itself on Christmas Day. The country folk were still pouring out of the chapel as he went by. He was greeted with old-fashioned curtsies from some of the older women, and the famous "feudal instinct" which Bill credited him with glowed with pleasure. It was a splendid world, after all! These were charming people. *His* people.

To his surprise he saw Marion Lanteglos make her way towards him from among the crowd of chapel-goers.

"You here, Marion?"

"Yes, and why not?"

"I thought you were a Quaker."

"And so I am. But there isn't a meeting house for miles, and I like the man who preaches in that chapel. He's simple and sincere and well-read. I enjoy going to listen to him." She smiled at Peter's surprise. "My dear friend," she said, with a little laugh, "I've been to all the churches and chapels in the neighbourhood while I've been down here. Now I go either to hear the Canon or Mr. Vivian, according to my mood."

"You like the Canon?" asked Peter, almost eagerly.

"He's a splendid old man, and I love the dignity of the Church of England's service. It is superb in many ways. But for a Quaker, perhaps, the less 'set' service of the chapel seems more friendly. I don't need to tell you what a Quaker meeting is like. You've been with Bill."

"And speaking of Bill, here he is! You didn't go with your wife, then, you infidel?"

"Infidel! I like that! And what about you?"

"Peter's been listening to Mr. Nanslowe."

Bill looked at his friend in awe.

"Poor chap! That's a waste of an Easter morning. Dry bones, that chap's got to offer you, nothing else. But before I forget, Peter, that Methodist parson from Marhamchapel met me just now and asked if I thought you'd be at liberty to receive him and Mr. Vivian from Trewint this afternoon?"

"I?" Peter looked from one to the other of his two friends in alarm. "What on earth can they want? Do you think I've got to see them, Marion? Can't you do it for me?"

Marion laughed gaily.

"You needn't be so alarmed," she told him, "I know what it's all about. They want to ask you to allow them to march their combined Sunday schools, conducted by the local silver band, through your grounds."

"From the Trewint gate to the Clowance lodge," grinned Bill, delighted at Peter's look of bewilderment.

"But what on earth for?" he asked.

"It's an annual ceremony, Peter. You can't get out of it, and it isn't so very terrible, anyhow. They simply march in procession up to the terrace, their band plays a special piece in your honour, you say a few words to the two parsons, give them something for the funds of their respective Sunday schools, and they march off and out by the other gate. Nothing to worry about, I assure you. All the Zabuloes have done it, though they've all been Church of England folk, as far as I can hear."

"Very well," said Peter resignedly, "but we must arrange to make it a little gayer than that. Lemonade and cake, or something of that sort. And now let's get back to lunch. I'm famished!"

The two parsons duly arrived early in the afternoon. Peter, having vainly implored Marion to help him receive them, had them shown into the library, thinking that to

be the most appropriate room for such an occasion. Many of the shelves in the great room were still empty, but he had already had sent down from London his not inconsiderable library, law books being his one extravagance of the lean years, and they made a brave array.

He was much interested to meet them in reality. He had now seen something of three forms of religion in the region—for he did not count the Quakerism of his two friends—and was eager to find out more of this particular form which he knew to hold more closely the hearts of the Cornish folk than those he had yet met.

Mr. Mitchell, the Primitive Methodist from Marham-chapel, was a man of middle age, middle height, with unusually penetrating eyes. Something of a fanatic, thought Peter. The other, Mr. Vivian of Trewint, the Wesleyan Methodist, was of a different type, more intelligence than fanaticism showing in his clean-shaven face with its generous mouth and wide-set grey eyes.

Peter heard their request with attention, promised to do as they asked, and made a few general remarks about the beauty of the villages, the kindness of the people, the unusual state of preservation of the old buildings, Zabuloe, Trewint, the two parish churches.

He noticed Mr. Mitchell's lips purse up at the mention of the churches, and as soon as he had paused the man broke in impetuously.

"I believe the living of Trewint is in your gift, Sir Peter. It's a crying shame that such a man as Mr. Nanslowe should be tolerated in this country-side. It is no less than countenancing the propagation of papacy in Cornwall."

"Oh, come, sir, I think you go a little far," Peter laughed a little uneasily. He was getting into deep waters. "He is a clergyman of the Established Church of England, and I have not the least doubt that he is doing what he believes to be his duty."

"That I am certain he is," agreed Mr. Vivian, in an evident endeavour to calm his colleague.

"His duty!" Mr. Mitchell was indignant. "And I suppose, Sir Peter, that you also approve of the Canon at Clowance, with his cards and his visits from Jesuits?"

Once again Mr. Vivian stepped into the breach.

"It would be impossible to find a clergyman of any denomination more beloved by the country folk, more assiduous in visiting the sick, helping the poor, all the round of duties which usually fall to men of his calling."

"I don't deny that," admitted Mr. Mitchell grudgingly, "but I feel very strongly that this papist influence must not be allowed to grow. It isn't seemly that a clergyman of the Church of England should welcome a Jesuit into his house, for instance."

"I've met this friend of Canon Holman's," said Peter, smiling, "and found him to be a charming, broad-minded man." He turned deliberately towards Mr. Vivian. "Tell me, sir, do you consider it a menace to your own belief to allow others who hold different beliefs from your own?"

Mr Mitchell frowned at the form in which the question had been put, but listened, nevertheless, while his colleague answered.

"It has always been my belief, Sir Peter," said the other man, almost apologetically, "that we must each seek Christ where we think that we can find Him. My friend, here, will certainly not agree with me here, for he will think I am giving way to a positive heresy. But since you ask me frankly I must answer you as frankly. It is my opinion that certain forms of religious belief are more suited to certain types of mind. I could never be a Roman Catholic myself. I could not accept many of the tenets of that form of religion, but I can conceive of minds to whom that form could appeal. Quakerism is very beautiful in its simplicity. I envy the robust faith which needs no help outside what each individual

can give to himself. 'What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.' I have always tried to take that as my rule of conduct. I am a Wesleyan because I feel that in that form of worship God can most easily reach myself and the people whose minister I endeavour to be. But I should be very far from trying to legislate for others."

Peter looked with interest at the parson. There was an earnestness and sincerity in his whole manner which had caught and held his respect.

"I cannot tell you how thoroughly I agree with you," he said, with a friendly and almost admiring smile. "After all, it seems to me to be essential to bear in mind that Catholic, Wesleyan, Methodist, Quaker, Episcopalian, you are all worshipping the same God. As I see it, the very essence of Protestantism must necessarily be toleration."

Mr. Mitchell could bear it no longer.

"Toleration?" he burst out excitedly, "not toleration for idolatry! No good or sincere Christian could admit that!"

Peter smiled patiently, knowing his own tendency to allow himself to become excited in argument, a tendency which his career at the bar had done much to overcome, but against which he must still be on his guard. His smile, too, was a little for himself. He was astonished and even somewhat amused that he should be taking this argument so much to heart as he undoubtedly was. It interested him so intensely.

"Isn't it a matter of interpretation, Mr. Mitchell?" he asked in a most conciliatory tone. "Catholics themselves, I know, admit the theory of symbolism, which they consider as helpful to certain types of mind. It is scarcely fair to condemn them wholesale as idolaters on that count. Have you discussed the matter with them, or with Mr. Nanslowe, even?"

"I have not, sir. I have no patience with such proceedings. I consider them as wicked." The man

was indignant. "And another thing. I find it insufferable that this Mr. Nanslowe should allow himself to say that I have no right to call myself God's minister, to perform the ceremonies of marriage and the Holy Communion!"

Peter leaned forward.

"Listen, Mr. Mitchell," he said very quietly, "I want you to let me put a point of view before you. It may take me a few minutes, but I should be grateful if you would let me go through to the end of what I have to say without interruption. You cannot fully grasp what I mean until I have finished."

The parson nodded his head, and Peter continued.

"As a Protestant you stand out for complete liberty of thought. You maintain that every man must be allowed to think out religious problems for himself and come to his own conclusions. This liberty of thought must necessarily mean a great divergence of individual opinion. There is an old Latin tag which is probably familiar to you. '*Tot homines, quot sententiae.*' Now to my mind, it is illogical and unreasonable to the last degree to demand the fullest freedom of thought for yourself—and for those who think like you—and to wish to limit that freedom of thought for others."

"But if it is a question of limiting their own freedom," burst out the parson, unable to remain silent any longer.

"I was just coming to that," smiled Peter. "Let us take that very point. Suppose that a certain body of Christians, after consideration, have come to the conclusion that they believe that their liberty of appreciation must be limited to what is told them by their priests, is it reasonable to set ourselves as judges *for them*, and condemn them for that opinion? They have as much right to accept that limitation as you to insist upon your right to complete freedom. No man need stay inside the Catholic Church unless he wishes, and if he chooses to do so it is because he has accepted

for himself, knowing all about them at the time, those limitations of which you complain. And one of them is the belief in what is called the Apostolic Succession. Belief in that doctrine necessitates the belief that all other persons than those regularly entering into that Apostolic Succession have no right to consider themselves as priests. You may not accept that belief *for yourself*, but to my mind you have no right to blame another for honestly accepting it for himself. It in no way interferes with you or deters you from acting on your own opinion. To those who believe as you do, you are a minister of God. To the others you are not. But your ministry is not towards them. It is towards those who think as you do. The Quakers, as good and sincere a body of people as one could hope to find on earth, do not believe in any form of ministry. They have no parson to marry them. The future husband and wife stand up together and take each other as man and wife before God. All these things are matters of personal conviction, and, as I say, it seems to me that those who call themselves Protestants are the least of all entitled to object to others holding other opinions from their own."

"But when a Church sets itself up to say that no one who doesn't think as they do can be saved? When it sends the rest of the world to burn in Eternal Hell Fire?"

"That is not so, Mr. Mitchell. You are referring to the Catholic Church, I know. I was under the same impression as you a few days ago, but I had a long conversation with the Canon and his friend the Jesuit, Père Anton, only the other night. Both of them stated in language that could leave no loophole for misunderstanding that any man who honestly follows the form of belief that he has adopted, be it Catholicism, Quakerism, Wesleyanism, or Congregationalism, who lives his life in accordance with his interpretation of Christ's doctrine, sincerely, to the best of his ability, can be saved."

"Is that really so?" asked Mr. Vivian eagerly; "did that Jesuit priest really agree with that statement?"

"He did."

"I find it hard to believe." Mr. Mitchell's lips closed into a hard line.

"I assure you that this is so. One day you must meet Père Anton, Mr. Mitchell. He is a most interesting, broad-minded man. I think you could not fail to like him."

"I find it hard to believe," repeated the other obstinately.

Peter smiled.

"Think it over," he said quietly. "It's worth it. Remember that, after all, you are all serving the same God, each in the way that seems best to you, and that even your widely differing forms have an enormous amount in common. The greatest things, or so it seems to me. The existence of God, Christ's life and mission on earth, His death and resurrection, man's hope of salvation and immortal life! What is the rest? A mere matter of Church government!"

For a moment there was complete silence. Peter was uneasy, feeling two pairs of eyes fixed on his face. Now that he was no longer expounding the case that had suddenly appeared so clearly before him in answer to the Methodist's fanatical attack on the Catholic Church and the Anglo-Catholicism of the Vicar of Trewint, he could not help but wonder at himself. What did it all matter to him, after all? He was no churchman. Why should he care?

As if in answer to his thoughts the Wesleyan suddenly addressed him.

"May I ask you, Sir Peter," he asked in his gentle voice, deep and kindly, "to what branch of the Church of Christ you yourself belong?"

To his intense annoyance Peter found himself flushing hotly.

"My dear sir," he answered, almost defiantly, almost

roughly, "I am not by any means sure that I should be prepared to call myself even a Christian!"

Mr. Vivian smiled, and his smile lit up his whole face.

"I should say, myself, sir," he said, "that you are the best Christian of us three!"

CHAPTER XV

FATHER AND SON VISIT CLOWANCE

THE next few weeks were a nightmare for Bart. He dared no longer pay his almost daily calls at Trewint. The most he ventured was to meet Martin in the fields or in the farmyard. He had seen the Squire about the village several times, and had caught glimpses of him entering Trewint to call on old Benny. He had been repeatedly conscious of his own inferiority to that handsome figure and would not risk provoking the comparison. His jealousy grew daily. He had passed the stage at which a man can reasonably examine a situation and come to a sane and balanced conclusion about it. He had felt, since that day when they had met in Clowance's "parlour," that all the world must laugh at him, that it must be clear to all that he was a hobbledehoy and the other an aristocrat. He became ridiculously sensitive about his appearance, his clothes, his shoes, his hands, and imagined that everyone who looked at him must be thinking how badly he compared with the Squire. The fact that in his way he was as fine a looking man as the other never occurred to him. Had he been told it he would not have believed it. For the time he was in an utterly abnormal state of mind.

And his difficulties did not stop there, of course. There was still the problem of Trewint fields.

He hardly allowed his father out of his sight for a moment those days. He watched his every movement, tried to be present at all his conversations, to be sure that he should say nothing that might give an inkling

as to what he intended to do. But the old farmer himself seemed preoccupied. He was certainly not a happy man during those spring days. He wandered around his farmstead, through his fields, and spent hours each evening, after the labourers and herdsmen had gone home, leaning over the gate that led to his "Naboth's vineyard."

Bart understood the situation well enough. He knew his father. The old man was not by nature dishonest. He was known throughout the neighbourhood as straight in his dealings and was respected by all. The step which he contemplated, since he could not succeed in his plan to marry his son to Clowance Zabuloe, was a grave one. If he persuaded the girl to sell, it was nothing less than theft, looked at squarely. But if she refused to sell, he would have to decide on what to do. Bart was sure that his father would put off trying the issue as long as possible.

But a morning came when he could see that his father was going to be forced to move. A Triumph motor bicycle stood leaning against the garden gate, in full sight of the village. The "dowser" had evidently tired of waiting!

It was after breakfast and the two men were sitting in the little room they called the office, when the visitor was announced.

"A man called Kemp to zee 'ee," bluntly announced their capable middle-aged serving woman, putting her head just round the door.

With a barely suppressed oath Matthew Nancecullom got to his feet. He threw a hurried glance at his son, but Bart had taken special pains to keep an expressionless face. What should he know of a man called Kemp? Who was to know that he had seen the Triumph leaning against the garden gate as they had left the "front room" after breakfast, or could draw any conclusions from that sight?

"I'll see him in the parlour, Mary," shouted the

farmer. "I'll not be a minute, son," he went on, making a great effort to control the anger—or was it fear?—in his voice. "Just you go through those sales. I make it a profit of a bare twenty-two pounds. Too little."

And he blundered out of the room.

For perhaps the first time in his life Bart deliberately indulged in eavesdropping. There was a door from the office into the garden behind the house. If he knelt on the path which ran under the windows of both the office and the "front room"—which in reality ran from front to back of that wing of the house—he could hear everything that went on during the interview, and be ready to get back to the office when his father should show signs of returning. He hated himself for what he was about to do, but must still do it. He *must* know what his father was going to do.

The interview was short enough.

"I told you not to come here, Kemp," was the farmer's angry opening.

The other man chuckled.

"So 'ee ded, zur! So 'ee ded!"

"Then why are you here, especially in the daytime, and at my own house?"

"Well, zur, et was this waay. Yew ded saay as yew'd be tellin' me as oall was fixed up inside o' the week. An' here's more'n three weeks gone an' noathin' done, so fur's I c'n zee. An' I was thinkin'——"

"It wasn't your place to think! If you come here like this you'll spoil everything. Have you been talking, too?"

Again the other laughed.

"Oh, no, zur! I d'knew better'n that!"

"And what do you think you've come here this morning for?"

Bart knew the sound of his father's voice. His anger was rising. Oldish man that he was, he was perfectly capable of striking this insolent "dowser."

" Well, zur, I thought as I'd jest talk to one or two, here an' there, to zee ef there might be any talk of any fresh *news* araound 'ere."

" Spying? You didn't trust me, eh? "

" Well, zur——"

" Get out! You hear me? Get out before I throw you out. And don't let me see you here again without being sent for! "

" But——"

" Not another word! I know what you want to threaten. Do as you wish. The girl will take no notice of you. She won't believe you. It'll do you no good, but go to her, if you want. You'll lose everything if you do, but please yourself. But one more piece of insolence or disobedience from you and I wash my hands of you. You've been paid your fee for your job. The rest was pure generosity because it suited me best not to have the whole matter talked about. You've no right to it. Talk if you like. And now get out! "

" But——"

" Get out, I tell you."

Footsteps sounded on the wooden floor; a door slammed. Bart went hastily back to the office.

His father was red in the face when he looked in at his son. His hat was already on his head.

" I'm going out," he said shortly. " Business. Don't expect I'll be back before noon. You see Thomas about those calves for me."

And he was gone.

Bart hesitated a minute. He was sure that his father would go straight down to Trewint, not daring to risk Kemp acting on his implied threat. Should he follow?

Matthew Nancecullom found Clowance at home. She received him somewhat formally in the drawing-room, where she had been arranging fresh flowers when the farmer had been announced.

" Good morning! "

She went forward to greet him with a smile that made the old man wish again that his first plan had been possible. What a pretty girl! What a wife for Bart!

"Good morning, Miss Clowance. Here's your old neighbour come to worry you again!"

She raised her eyebrows in surprise.

"Not to worry me, I hope. What can I do for you?"

"Won't you marry Bart, Miss Clowance?" he burst out impulsively; "the lad adores you, worships you! He's just eating his heart out for you!"

"I'm sorry." There was a hard note in her clear voice, and in those blue eyes something cold which almost made the old man shiver. "What you ask is impossible. I have already told your son. I think that must be the end of that subject."

"Not good enough for you, eh?" At those almost scornful words the farmer had turned nasty. "Too fine for a good honest farmer's son? The Nanceculloms are as good as the Zabuloes any day. They pay their debts, young lady, which is more than your fine family can say!"

Clowance frowned. She stared at the old man in angry astonishment.

"I'm afraid I don't understand you," she said at last; "perhaps you'd be so good as to explain?"

The farmer shuffled uneasily in his seat. He was conducting this interview like a fool. He had let himself be rude and angry. No way to deal with a Zabuloe. You got nothing from them by bullying. They were not Kemp's sort. He must change his tactics.

"Listen, Miss Clowance. I spoke hastily. If you don't love my boy, you don't, and there's an end to it. It's a pity, for he's a good boy, but there you are. You don't want him. It would have settled this question of those fields without any difficulty, of course, but that's neither here nor there. Now tell me, point-blank, Miss Clowance, will you sell me those fields?"

The girl stood looking at him for some seconds before replying. This was a most peculiar interview.

"No," she said finally. "I don't want the money. I see no reason to sell them."

Once more Matthew Nancecullom let his anger get the better of him.

"You won't, won't you? You don't need the money, don't you? But I tell you that I do! I need that money! Long before she died I'd been lending money to your grandmother. Those lawyers of hers wouldn't let her borrow any more, she said, but Trewint was hers. I lent her money on that security. Years I've waited for the Zabuloe honour to show itself. And well I might wait! But now I'd like to see the colour of my money!"

Very white but very calm, Clowance stood with her back to the empty hearth, her hands behind her back. Just the very image of the way her grandfather used to stand, thought old Matthew, envying this young girl her iron self-control.

"What is the sum?" she asked quietly.

"Oh, I promised your grandmother I'd not be hard on you. I'll ask no interest," began the farmer, but he was coldly interrupted.

"I should be obliged if you would calculate the sum at five per cent. interest—*compound* interest."

Her eyes were like points of blue fire. He sat silent, ashamed of himself.

"Round about two thousand pounds," he grunted out at last; "but I don't want your interest. And couldn't we arrange things better than that?" he asked, his voice suddenly taking on a persuasive tone; "couldn't we just say that you'll give me those fields, and then we needn't remember those old loans to your grandmother any more."

Clowance gazed at him in open astonishment.

"Two thousand pounds for those fields?" She laughed at him. "That's absurd, Mr. Nancecullom! They're hardly worth four hundred. I asked Mr. Sleeman

the other day. Even if I were prepared to part with them I could never agree to such a settlement of my debts."

"But don't you see"—again the farmer was exerting all his powers of persuasion, his face all smiles now, his voice honeyed—"it isn't just a business matter! I know well enough that the fields aren't worth that money. But I know you don't want to part with them. And I want them. Just to round off the farm properly. It's an old man's whim, Miss Clowance, to leave his son the farm as it was a hundred years ago, as it was until an old Nancecullom lost those fields to one of the Zabuloes on a bet. Humour an old man!"

Clowance eyed him searchingly.

"It's a very great deal to pay for a whim, Mr. Nancecullom," she said at last, with a faint movement of her eyebrows. "In any case, I won't give you a final answer to-day. I must consult my lawyers. But I can hold out very little hope to you. I think I should rather pay my debts right out, and I should be obliged if you will be so good as to prepare me a statement, with the dates and the sums, of the loans you made my grandmother. I regret that I did not know of them before. They should have been paid."

Matthew Nancecullom got up with a sigh from the deep chair in which he had been sitting throughout the interview.

"Very well," he said, picking up his hat and stick, "have them you shall, and the papers she signed. I'm not trying to cheat you, young lady," he added grimly, and then flushed hotly as he remembered just what he had been trying to do that morning.

He had hardly had time to take his leave before Bart rushed into the room.

"Miss Clowance!" He did not heed her astonished glance at his wild appearance. He was past caring. "What has my father been saying to you? Did you promise to sell him those fields? Did you?"

"Sit down, Bart." Clowance took up her favourite position before the fire-place. "I'm too bewildered by your family's behaviour this morning to know exactly what to think. Your father *has* been asking me to sell him the fields. He's also been telling me that I owe him about two thousand pounds. He offered to wipe out the debt if I gave him the fields."

Bart nodded his head slowly.

"I thought so," he said.

"But what does it all mean?" asked the girl; "his manner was most extraordinary, and now," she smiled a little as she looked at the young man in front of her, "*you* come here with your hair all on end and so hot that you must have been running like a madman. What am I to understand by all this mystery?"

Bart didn't answer. He sat with a far-away look on his face for a few seconds, almost as if he had heard no word of what the girl had been saying to him. Then he suddenly got up from his seat and went over impulsively to where she stood, taking her unwilling hand in his.

"Won't you marry me, Miss Clowance?" he said wildly, desperately. "I've loved you for years. I can't get on without you. I'm nearly mad. I hardly know what I'm saying. But I'd let you do what you liked with me. I'd be just your factor, your servant. Only marry me! I promise you I'd get you back the Manor. Inside the year. I promise it. It's the only way. Couldn't you, Miss Clowance? Not to get the Manor back?"

"Bart!" Clowance had snatched her hand angrily away. "I think you're right. You *are* mad! I told you the other day that I couldn't marry you, and you promised not to speak about it again. If we are to remain friends you must keep to that promise. I don't love you, Bart, and I never could. I'm quite certain, or I wouldn't say so."

"But to get back the Manor!" The man's voice was broken and hoarse with emotion.

"This is enough of that nonsense!" Clowance was becoming angry. This ridiculous atmosphere of mystery in which she had lived throughout the morning was beginning to tell on her nerves. "Let's get away from all this. You'd better take a drink of wine. I'll ring. You'll feel better after that."

She was leaning over towards the bell beside the mantelpiece, but the man pushed her hand roughly away.

"No. You've got to listen to me first! I know why you won't have anything to do with me. I'm only a farmer's son. You're in love with that young aristocrat up at the Manor! You've forgotten all about how he's turned you out of your home! You don't remember any more all you told me about him being a vulgar *nouveau riche*! I've seen him coming in here—to see old Benny, he said, I've no doubt!—but it was to see you. I've seen you together in the lanes and the villages! I've watched you. Yet I've done you nothing but good all my life long, and he's turned you out of your home! And I could give it back to you! But I'm no good to you! I'm not Sir Peter Zabuloe. I'm only Bart Nancecullom! I didn't steal Zabuloe Manor, but *I could give it back to you!*"

Clowance was almost afraid. There was a wildness in this man's words, in his bloodshot eyes, in his trembling hands, which could not but alarm her. But she tried to show nothing.

"Bart," she said very quietly, "I don't think you quite realise all that you're saying. I think you'd better go."

For a moment he looked at her in silence. Then, with a very weary gesture, he swept his hair off his forehead and stood up.

"I'm afraid you're right," he said in a dull voice, utterly without expression. "I'm sorry. Try to forgive me and to forget what I've been saying, if you can."

And then, without another word, or waiting for her to reply, he strode out of the room.

Two thousand pounds for Trewint fields !

And all that queer insistence on her marrying Bart
to get the Manor back !

What could it all mean ?

She sat down at her desk and wrote a letter to her
lawyer at Bodmin.

CHAPTER XVI

DEVELOPMENT

"I'll concede you something."

Peter was sitting with his two friends on the terrace after dinner. It was late in May, and the air was warm even at half-past eight. It was the last evening, for the house was now ready, and Bill and Marion could no longer find an adequate excuse for staying in Cornwall. Peter's persuasions were in vain. Bill must go back to his firm.

"That's a good start, anyway," grinned Bill.

"I've been thinking about what we were discussing that night in Exeter on our way down. You remember, Marion?"

She nodded.

"Two things, though they're really very closely linked," she said, almost dreamily. There was a languorous feeling about the peace of that noble terrace. There was a close-clipped lawn now where there had been a meadow, below the wall, but the stream still glided idly between high rushes in the meadow at the foot of the hill. "The cult of selfishness and the burden of riches."

Bill laughed, and put a caressing arm round his wife's shoulders.

"All in capitals! But I think you've got it wrong. If you talk about the cult of selfishness you must say the *freedom* of riches."

"Have it your own way," agreed Peter, smiling.
"You've got the idea, though I remember saying that

a rich man was a peculiarly free man. Up to a point I was right. Since I've joined the ranks of the rich I've been able to pick my cases, and I'll admit to having enjoyed it. But, on the other hand, Marion was also right that there's a special servitude about riches. I'm going to be original—or is it merely perfectly usual in these cases?—and admit to enjoying that, too!”

Marion glanced lazily at him

“Don't be too obscure, Peter,” she begged. “I'm not too intelligent at the best of times, but this evening I'm too supremely comfortable to think!”

“All right. I'll explain. Bill one day, when I first heard about my uncle's legacy, told me that if he'd inherited so much money he'd probably build an orphanage.” Husband and wife exchanged understanding glances. “He said he couldn't bear to use so much money for himself alone. Well, I understand him now. I jeered at him that day. But I'm going to build that hospital I told you about. It's a funny business. If I'd been poor, as I was before this money was left me, I should have found it quite natural to bother no more about it on hearing that there wasn't a hospital any nearer than Bodmin for all these people around Zabuloe. I'd have felt—if I'd even got as far as arguing it out at all—that I'd barely as much as would keep me in food and clothes and a decent lodging, and it was none of my business. But with all that money in the bank I've an uncomfortable feeling that it's somehow up to me to put things straight. I couldn't get away from it if I tried. Not that I want to. I'm going to enjoy that hospital in more ways than one. It'll bring you two down here again, for one thing.”

“Excellent,” remarked Bill with satisfaction. “I can see myself producing a most creditable hospital.”

“There's a good deal of Marion's larger form of selfishness about it all, I know.” Marion shook her head, smiling at him. “Oh, yes, there is! But it isn't entirely

selfish. I've found myself doing a host of things down here because they're expected of me, though they bore me pretty badly, because—well, because . . .”

“Because they were your duty,” finished Bill curtly.

Peter flushed uncomfortably.

“Put it that way if you like. Anyway, I'm ready to concede that wealth does bring a certain number of obligations in its train, and I'm also prepared to admit that I find life more amusing since I've taken an interest in all these people here. It's going back on all I've held for years, but it's true. I thoroughly enjoy talking to them all, hearing about their families. Queer, how one gets a new outlook on things.”

“Freedom, just plain freedom, is a fine thing,” put in Bill reflectively, “but if it's merely freedom from worry it's sometimes a pretty poor affair.”

“Perhaps you're right. Anyway, it's all a new experience to me, and Heaven alone knows where it's going to lead me. To giving you your orphanage, in the end, even, maybe, though not yet. I've got to endow my hospital first, as well as build it.”

“I wondered what you were going to do about that,” said Marion, smiling. “I was terribly afraid that you'd forgotten that it won't be able to run by itself.”

“Oh, that's all right,” said Peter cheerfully, lighting a cigarette and sinking a little lower into his comfortable easy chair. “I've been talking to all these parsons about it. That was while you were in Devonshire on that other job of yours a fortnight ago,” he explained in answer to her look of surprise. “I had 'em all up here. Didn't warn 'em that they were going to meet each other, but just asked 'em all together. The atmosphere was a little chilly at first, but the old Canon is a thorough man of the world, and that chap Vivian is a thoroughly good sort. Between them they got us all thawed out; we talked the whole scheme over, and came to the conclusion that it wouldn't do the villages any good to get the whole business for nothing. They must feel that it was theirs, and

that it was up to them to work for this hospital, once it's built. And I got 'em all agreeing to talk to their own flocks and see if they couldn't all work together. General committee of all the parsons assisted by leading citizens "

" That's a pretty good piece of work," admitted Bill admiringly.

" All the praise for that goes to the Canon and Mr. Vivian. But, of course, the villages can't manage to pay for the upkeep of the place, even then. But with this new policy of mine of picking and choosing, I find I'm being offered such stupendous fees that I'll soon be able to look after the deficit without touching my private income." He grinned at his friend. " One of the advantages of my economic freedom, old son," he remarked, with a touch of malice.

It was indeed true that Peter, now that he had decided to take only such cases as interested him, so as to leave himself more freedom to come down to his newly discovered county, had rapidly become a much-sought-after young barrister. The fact that he could—and did—refuse quite a number of cases which might have brought him in large fees had had its psychological effect. He had become the fashion, and could ask almost what he liked.

" And so we begin the new chapter," said Marion in a soft voice.

He looked at her sharply.

" Not yet," he answered slowly. " This is still only the prologue."

In the morning he saw them off. It was one thing to repeat all his thanks to Marion for making such a beautiful home for him, and to listen, smiling, to Bill's loud complaints that no one mentioned his exquisite plumbing, though he knew that Peter did take baths, and although they didn't use much electric light in these long days or need his central heating plant in these summer months, he had felt it very keenly that so little notice had been taken of him.

But those parting jokes only made him feel his loneliness the more, and realise how much more than plumbing, furnishing and decoration he owed to that couple of friends. He owed them his reconciliation with the world, with life, and his new approach to happiness.

An approach only.

Peter had come out of his shell very thoroughly. Even while Marion and Bill had been with him he had frequently taken them or gone alone to the Royal Cornwall Golf Links outside Bodmin. Here he had met with several representatives of "The County," and had often been asked to lunch and dine—invitations which he had finally been obliged to accept, not wishing to appear boorish. They were pleasant folk, and his name had made it easy for them to welcome him as one of themselves.

He was an eligible bachelor, too, but only to a very limited extent. As time went on he found that what was expected of him and what was coming to be his own most secret longing were one and the same thing.

For Clowance was often of these parties.

In the old days before Peter's appearance, when she had been a poverty-stricken owner of a heavily mortgaged estate, she had steadily refused offers of hospitality which were constantly pressed on her by old friends of her family, but which she knew she could never hope to return. Her youth and the remoteness of her country home had made her refusals seem quite natural. But the sale of Zabuloe had changed all this. To Trewint she need not be ashamed to invite her friends. Her small spare capital allowed her to afford herself an occasional pretty dress. She began to accept the invitations, and what more natural, when they were going to the same houses, than for Peter to offer to take her in his car, and for her to accept his offers?

On those drives over miles of the roads and lanes of his beloved Cornwall they discussed a hundred subjects

Peter learned to rejoice in her quick and original mind, the fresh points of view she was always revealing to him.

He was very deeply in love.

This was something very different from his feeling for Laura. Often, after a chance encounter, when he had caught at the joy of a few words with Clowance in the lanes, in the village streets, he would laugh at himself when he thought that he had once imagined that his feeling for that other girl had been love! He had been taken by Laura's flower-like beauty. He still admitted that she had been very beautiful. He even conceded that Clowance was not beautiful, if judged by those standards. She had none of that perfection of feature, that ethereal delicacy of colouring which had made the other girl fit so perfectly his description of her as "Spring personified." Clowance, with her deep blue, black-fringed eyes, her black curls, her queer warm pallor, was of another type. But Clowance had personality. Clowance was a friend, a comrade, and would always be a friend and comrade, to the man she loved. Laura had been a pretty picture, a plaything.

Marion and Bill Lanteglos had begun his second education. Clowance was continuing, all unconsciously, to wean him from that cheap bitterness and cynicism which had coloured his lonely years since the death of his father. Hers was no silly unreasoning optimism, but a very robust faith in the destiny of mankind. He felt ashamed of some of his old arguments when he saw her blue eyes greet them with scorn, and before long they tended to disappear from their discussions.

As the summer months crept on, his visits to London became more and more rare, of shorter and shorter duration. He could not bear the thought of the chance meetings he might miss, the invitations to the same houses that he would have to refuse. He took fewer and fewer cases, and his reputation grew.

Marion and Bill had long realised what had happened to him. The romantic in Marion was more than satisfied

with the turn events seemed likely to take, for to her mind nothing could be more natural than that Peter should ask Clowance to come back to share with him her old home or that the girl should accept. Who could fail to fall in love with Peter, this new Peter whom she had helped to break down his rugged bitter crust and show his charm, his intelligence? Not, surely, a country girl, who must be almost dazzled by him, her romantic cousin. It was the perfect match.

She managed to keep the irrepressible Bill from indulging in the usual jokes on the subject. It was too delicate a plant to be tampered with. Peter had tacitly let her into his secret, not in so many words, but by inferences, but to Bill he had never mentioned it or hinted of it.

The two of them waited patiently but with growing anxiety to be told that all was well. They dared ask nothing, though on his flying visits Peter never said a word, and his anxiety to get back to Zabuloe spoke eloquently of his state of mind.

Then came a big case which he could not well refuse, which would make his reputation if he should win it, but which would keep him in London for two interminable weeks.

He lived in a ferment of excitement. He had made this case, in his own mind, the touchstone of his fortunes. If he should win, not only his career at the bar, but his other, dearer battle would be won. Clowance would come back to Zabuloe. If he should lose—but he would not contemplate that! He had put into that case an energy, a concentration, a wealth of reading and research that he had never given to any of his work before, even in the days of his bitterest struggle for success. It was more than success that he was working for now.

As the days of the court proceedings went forward, dreary, endless days of attention to detail, he was often hard put to it to keep his mind on his work. He would find his imagination carrying him away to those leafy

lanes where the smell of the new-cut hay must be drifting under his nostrils, where the swish of the scythe must be delighting the ear . . . and then he would drag his attention back to the interminable drone of voices, in an agony of anxiety lest he should have missed some vital point, the point which might win or lose him his case.

When the moment came for him to address the jury he excelled himself. He had prepared his speech with care, but more than that was needed—and more was forthcoming. A sudden and brilliant inspiration changed a painstaking statement of the case he was defending into a dazzling piece of eloquence which swept the court off its feet and carried all before it.

He refused the invitation to dinner, a celebration of his victory, on a plea of fatigue. And it was no idle plea. He was utterly exhausted. His client insisted on taking him back to his rooms, but Peter was silent all the way, and merely replied with a laconic acknowledgment to the torrent of thanks. He took his leave as quickly as he could, ran up the stairs and flung himself on to his bed, to sleep, fully dressed, for hours. He awoke at midnight to the realisation that he had gained his first battle, sighed with relief to know that his tremendous effort was over, took a hot bath and went to bed properly to sleep once more until eight o'clock, when his landlady, who had been told to get his breakfast for seven, had at last timidly ventured to rap on his door.

She had expected fulminations. Peter was apt to be irritable in the early morning, and disliked nothing more than for his instructions not to be carried out to the letter. But this morning found him in the most buoyant of good humours.

His bags had all been packed the night before, and the garage had been told to bring his car round at eight o'clock. It stood waiting for him, and it was only the work of a minute to arrange his bags in the boot and settle himself in the driving seat, once his delicious breakfast had been dispatched.

His landlady watched him drive off with a complacent smile on her broad features.

"Well, thank 'eaven, 'e can still eat 'earty! But, mark my words, Em'ly"—Emily was the housemaid whose young man approved a little too energetically of Peter's taste in tobacco and cigarettes—" 'e won't be with us long! Park Lane for 'im!"

She had the greatest opinion of her lodger, and had taken his new honours as a matter of course. She'd always known that he would make his name.

Peter drove down to Cornwall like the wind. It was mid-week and the roads were fairly free. He had originally counted on arriving there somewhere between five and six in the evening. Although he had started a full hour behind the time he had planned, he heard Trewint church clock strike six o'clock as he swept into the village.

He drew up in front of the gate of Trewint House with his heart missing beats like any schoolboy, and walked up to the door, which in these summer months usually stood hospitably open. It was very quiet inside. As he waited for Adam to answer the bell he rehearsed what he intended to say, repeated the words that he had prepared all along his road from London. . . .

"Is Miss Clowance at home?"

"No, zur. She went aout half an hour ago with some flowers for the church," the old man smiled confidentially. "'T'es always Miss Clowance as the Canon asks when he wants it to be a special service, zur"

"The Canon? Then she's gone to Clowance church, not to Trewint?"

"Aw ess, zur. Ted'n Miss Clowance as does the flowers f'r Mr. Nanslowe. Ef you was to go right away, you'd be certain to catch her. She'll be just ababout gettin' there naow."

Clowance!

It took him ten minutes to get round to the other village, for the lanes were narrow and always full of

children at that hour of the evening. Besides, she'd be inside the church still. There was no sign of her all along the way, nor yet in the churchyard itself. The door of the church was open and he could just catch a glimpse of a long stream of coloured light lying along the aisle, where the evening sun shone through a western window. Clowance church was famous for its beautiful old stained glass. It made a very lovely picture, framed by the door of the old church.

While he waited, Peter wandered into the churchyard. He didn't want to show himself yet. His steps instinctively took him to the grave of that other Peter Zabuloe. It had recently been one of his new self-appointed tasks to see that the Zabuloe graves were neatly kept, and the lettering stood out more clearly now than on that frosty Christmas Day when he had first read the inscription.

"Ah, Sir Peter, I see you are interested in that old fellow!"

It was the Canon who stood beside him. Peter restrained a movement of annoyance and stood up to greet the old clergyman.

"Yes. Do you know anything about him?" he asked politely.

"As a matter of fact, I do." Canon Holman smiled. "I don't think there is anything mentioned about him in that history of the family that I lent you. He was one of the famous old parson-squires, you know. A fine old fellow."

"I've often wondered. The inscription is rather unusual."

"Ah! you noticed that? Yes. That had a reason." The Canon settled himself on the bench on which Peter had been sitting. Peter cast a hasty glance towards the church door. There was still no sign of Clowance. "He went through a very strange phase, that old Peter Zabuloe. For a long time he was an old pagan of the worst sort, drinking, gambling, and I hardly like to say

what ! A regular old reprobate. Then, quite suddenly, he was converted from his evil ways. He heard John Wesley preach. He was tremendously impressed. He met Wesley in person, talked with him. Then he got himself appointed to this living, in his own village, and they say he converted the whole neighbourhood. He never followed Wesley when he left the Church, though. He remained a strict churchman to the end, but he chose his own tombstone. You'll notice he calls himself plain Peter Zabuloe, though he was already a baronet, heir to the old title, when he took orders. 'Here lieth in peace the *body* of Peter Zabuloe.' And his *soul*, Sir Peter, has gone to render its account to its Maker. He was very sure of that ! I have some of his old sermons. I found them in Plymouth, one day, in a second-hand book shop. They must have been sold by mistake, I suppose. All in manuscript in a great leatherbound volume."

"Would you let me see them ?" asked Peter, rather shyly.

The Canon examined him curiously.

"Certainly, if they would interest you," he said, smiling as he noticed how the other man's eyes never left the church porch. "Is it the subject or the man who interests you ?" he continued idly.

"Both," was his brief reply. Then he broke out impulsively, facing the Canon with a look of the utmost earnestness on his face. "I'm passionately interested in the subject of immortality, sir," he said. "It is hideous to me to think of lying here one day, in this very churchyard, perhaps, while the beautiful world will go on. The hills around my home will be unchanged. Only I shall change !" He shuddered involuntarily. "Graves, worms and decay ! It is all too horrible ! I should like to live to a hundred, a thousand years, to continue to be in the midst of the living, breathing world, to see how life develops, what will happen to humanity in coming generations. Can't you understand, sir, the

horror of all that *this* means," he made a wide gesture to include the peaceful churchyard, very lovely in the evening light, "when one thinks of these eternal hills, the sea, life, life that will go on without me when I am lying under some block of granite, like my ancestor there? Without me! When I ache to have my part in it all!"

He turned away, his hands clenched together, his mouth hard and bitter with restrained emotion.

"And yet I, Sir Peter, feel no horror at this lovely churchyard. I am glad to think that when my time comes I shall be put to rest in the shadow of that old cypress tree and those lichened walls. Do you not remember the words that open that very beautiful service for the burial of the dead? 'I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord, he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever believeth in Me shall never die.' And again, '*I know* that My Redeemer liveth.'"

There was such a note of triumph in the voice which spoke those last words that Peter looked at the Canon with a certain awe. The old face was lit with a positive radiance of faith.

"I'd give anything on earth, sir, to have your certitude and conviction!"

Canon Holman sighed.

"Then it will come to you, young man," he said tranquilly. "And here is my god-daughter. Clowance, my dear, I had meant to come in and see if I could help you, but I found Sir Peter, here, meditating among the tombs and I stayed to tell him of the story of his ancestor, this Peter." They were standing up, and he pointed down to the tombstone. "And I'm afraid I must have been a little tedious with my talk. Come and join us, dear child."

Clowance slipped her hand through the arm of the Canon and looked up at Peter with interest.

"You? Meditating among the tombs?" she asked,

with a little movement at the corners of her lips, "it doesn't seem to me to be quite in the picture."

"No? And why not?" asked Peter, smiling at the delightful picture she made, in her cool green linen frock, very simple but moulding perfectly the slim lines of her figure which made her seem so much taller than she was, and on her head a wide Leghorn hat trimmed with nothing but a green ribbon to match the dress.

"Well, I think of you as being in the very middle of things, not dreaming in churchyards. Where have you been all this time? I haven't seen you lately."

Peter flushed with pleasure. So she *had* missed him!

"In London."

"What did I tell you? In the middle of things!"

"Sir Peter has just been telling me that he wishes he could live a thousand years," put in the Canon in his suave old voice. He was watching the play of expression on the two faces with interest. This pleasant young man and his beloved godchild! What better arrangement could be thought of?

"A thousand years? How perfectly terrible!"

"But think," Peter was swept into his subject almost before he knew it, "to live only the seventy years we seem to have a right to expect! To leave all this wonderful world behind and find the end of everything in seven feet of earth!"

Clowance smiled. Then her eyes sought those of the old Canon in a look of perfect understanding.

"But it's not the end of everything, is it, Uncle Tom?" she said quietly. "Sir Peter, if you can live in these villages and still believe that your seven feet of earth are the end of everything, I pity you. If I thought so, perhaps *I'd* want to live on in lonely splendour for a thousand years. I'd be afraid of death, too."

"And you aren't?"

The question left his lips almost reluctantly. This was not the sort of conversation he intended to be having with Clowance Zabuloe!

"No!"

For a moment she hesitated to go on, but Canon Holman at her side nodded his head, as if he had understood her hesitation and its reason.

"Sir Peter, you've seen a lot of old Benny Cowling this summer. He's a simple old Methodist. Has he ever spoken to you about death? He thought it was very near to him that night when you brought him to my house! Did he ever tell you how he felt about it?"

Peter nodded his head. Well he remembered the scene.

"Well, didn't that mean anything to you?"

"I thought it one of the most moving things I had ever witnessed," he said slowly, meeting her eyes.

"And can you believe that whatever Power that made us—whether you believe in Christ in whom I believe or not—could ever mock at such faith? There *must* be a life beyond the grave, even if it is only because such as Benny are so certain!"

Peter smiled.

"I'm not disputing what you say, but I feel that the reason is a little inadequate on which to build such a tremendous theory."

"Oh, but that's not all I've got to say. Think of Benny again. I don't want to criticise you in particular, but I am certain that Benny is a far better man than you, a far better man than I am a woman. He's as near to being a saint as anyone I've ever met, except my dear old godfather!" She squeezed the old man's arm against her side, and looked at him with such tenderness in her eyes that Peter was deeply moved. "Yet poor old Benny has had as hard a life as one could have. His only daughter died while nursing in a hospital in Plymouth, from an illness she contracted from a patient. One of his sons was killed in the war. The other came back a cripple. Last year his wife died, the wife he'd loved all his life, and he had to watch her die in agony, of cancer. Don't you think it would be a fair inference

to make that there *must* be another life in which all these things are straightened out, where old Benny may have the happiness he has deserved but never had in this one? "

"A probability is not a certainty, Miss Clowance! "

"No," the girl admitted readily, "but when one looks at all these cases—there is Bart Nancecullom's mother, who was a hopeless invalid from his birth; there is poor witless Zacky—doesn't it bring to your mind a *conviction* that *somewhere* all these inequalities are put right? If you aren't prepared to believe that this whole universe is the work of a demon, of a devil who delights to see his creatures suffer, I don't know how you are to escape that issue."

Peter was silent. What was he to say in the face of such superb faith? He had no arguments that he wanted to oppose those of Clowance Zabuloe. He was only too anxious to think as she did, and even had he a thousand ways of denying her reasoning, his every instinct would have fought against exposing them to this girl.

Canon Holman must have guessed a little of what was in his mind.

"Well, my dear," he said, "I must leave you now. I've someone coming to see me this evening. A little matter of banns for next Sunday, I guess," his eyes twinkled, "and I mustn't be late."

"I'll come with you," Clowance told him, eagerly—too eagerly, thought Peter—it almost seemed as if she did not want to be left alone with him! "I've one or two things to talk over with Miss Holman. Good evening, Sir Peter! Are you staying here for a while now, or shall you go back to Town again soon? "

"Oh, I'm here for a little while now," he answered, taking the hand she held out to him. "I want a holiday."

"Sir Peter's planning to give a garden-party to all the three villages next month, my dear "

"Not——" a look of inquiry and excitement broke out on her face—"not a 'Squire's Birthday Party' ? "

Peter's hot flush answered for him.

But the look on Clowance Zabuloe's face as she turned away made him almost glad that the Canon had met them in the churchyard and prevented him from asking her that question which had been burning in his heart all the way down from London.

What would she have answered him ?

CHAPTER XVII

TREWINT FIELDS AGAIN

BART had been a witness to the little scene in the churchyard. Since his outburst in Clowance's "parlour," he had been more shy of meeting her than ever, but none the less passionately jealous, and he had made it a habit to follow her around, unknown to her, whenever the Squire was in Zabuloe. It was becoming more and more an obsession with him that, even though he might never have Clowance himself, Peter Zabuloe must never marry her.

The violence of his jealousy, together with his constant anxiety about his father, were preying on his nerves to such an extent that his mind was never free from these two worries. He could never rest. And yet he had not yet been able to decide to end his troubles by telling Clowance about the secret of the Trewint fields.

The evening of Peter's return was the turning point. He had seen the earnestness of their discussion, the smiles they had exchanged, and finally he had heard those words about the "Squire's Birthday Party."

So he was going to revive that, was he?

It had been an annual function in the three villages in the old days. Old Lady Zabuloe had kept it up even after the death of her husband, and only the extreme poverty in which the girl had been left had kept Clowance from carrying on the custom.

It was a great day! All the inhabitants of the three Zabuloe villages were asked to the party, men, women and children. There was a cricket match, bowls for the older

men, wrestling for the younger, races for the children. A band was always hired for dancing in the evening. It was a kind of Durbar, when the whole district paid allegiance to the Squire and wished him long life.

And so Peter Zabuloe was going to set himself up as Squire, indeed, was he?

Bart watched Peter, sitting on the bench by the side of the tombstone, his eyes following the graceful figure of the girl, leaning on the old Canon's arm. A hopeless lover himself, he knew what that expression in those blue eyes must mean!

"Well, Sir Peter," he had walked noiselessly over the grass from the lich-gate where he had been hiding, "So you're planning to give a party, are you?"

There was something vaguely insolent in the man's manner which surprised Peter. He had seemed such a pleasant fellow, that day at Trewint House.

"Ah, has the Canon been telling you about that?" he answered, "I'd been asking him to tell me how these things were usually arranged. I want it to be a success, and everything in England always hinges on whether one does just what has always been done before!" He laughed lightly. "I hope I shall be able to count on your help?" he added in a different tone. "I should value it very highly."

Bart smiled. It was a queer twisted smile.

"I don't advise you to give that party, Sir Peter," he said, in a meaning tone. "That's my advice to you! Good evening!"

He lifted his cap ceremoniously and strode away, leaving Peter gazing after him in amazement.

Bart made for home. He was going to have the whole thing out with his father, and then go and tell Clowance the whole story. That would finish this nightmare.

But the farmer was not in the house. Bart waited some time before starting his supper, but finally sat down to his lonely meal, to brood over his troubles.

If his father didn't come in, he'd go and tell Clowance first and have it out with him afterwards.

The farmer did not appear. Eight o'clock struck and nine, and still there was no sign of Matthew Nancecullom, so that finally Bart had to give up his wait. He put on his cap and strode down the lanes to Trewint House.

Clowance had returned to find visitors awaiting her return.

"The Squire was here askin' after 'ee, Miss Clowance," Adam informed her as soon as she had arrived, "and naow there's Mr. Sleeman and another gentleman waitin' for 'ee in the parlour."

"Mr. Sleeman?" repeated the girl, with evident excitement.

"Yes, Miss Clowance, and Zillah says is she to serve supper for three or will the gentlemen be going away directly, for it's all ready naow?"

"Oh, supper for the three of us, certainly." Her eyes were far away. She stood there looking into space, unheeding Adam's anxious face beside her.

Finally he made up his mind to break through the daydream.

"And the Squire, Miss Clowance? I telled 'ee that he'd find yew in the church, with the flowers."

She nodded her head.

"I saw the Squire," she said impatiently, "but tell me, has Mr. Sleeman been here long?"

"'Baout twenty minutes, that's all."

"Very well. Tell Zillah she can serve the meal as soon as she's ready. The sooner the better."

The old lawyer rose to greet her as she came into the room. There was a smile on his face to meet the eagerness on hers. Since that day when he had announced that Peter had asked for particulars of the Manor, the relationships between the lawyer and his client had entirely changed. She had ceased to be the proud, almost sulky schoolgirl who had held aloof from him,

and become a favourite, treated like a very dear niece.

"Well, my dear! How pretty and fresh you look!" he said, taking her two hands in his. "And this is Mr. Elliot, an expert in minerology, who has come here to give us his advice in our problem."

She flashed a brilliant smile at the keen-faced man who had stood to shake hands with her.

"I hope we haven't brought you here on a wild goose chase," she said, with a nervous little laugh. "It's all so very queer. Has Mr. Sleeman explained it all to you?"

"Vaguely, vaguely," answered the lawyer, before the other could reply. "I rather thought that it might be better for you to do that yourself, if you judged it wise. I wasn't quite sure what you would want me to say." He smiled at her indulgently. "You're a young person of such very decided ideas!"

Adam appeared discreetly at the door at that moment, and it was not until the simple meal was over that they were able to discuss the subject that was in all their minds. It would never do to tell that particular story before Adam.

"Then I am to understand that you were offered two thousand pounds for these four fields?" Mr. Elliot repeated, when she had told her story—or that part of it which was needed to understand what had aroused her interest in the Trewint lower fields.

"Offered? I was *pressed* to accept them."

"And in your opinion," he turned to the lawyer, "they are not worth anything like that sum?"

"Four hundred at the very outside," was the curt answer.

"You'll see," Clowance explained eagerly, "they're all full of stones. Grazing ground at the best. Or so we've always thought. Shall we go out and look at them now?"

"I should be glad to do so. Just one minute, though." Clowance was opening the french window, and would

have led the way at once. "I've a box of tricks here which I hope we may need to use" He smiled at her excitement "I think I left it in the hall"

The little company of three made its way across the meadows all unaware that there was a witness to their evening walk. Matthew Nancecullom had been in the village when the lawyer's car had arrived. He had seen the face of the man who had accompanied him, and noticed the "box of tricks" He was no fool, and he had a marvellous memory for faces. Christopher Elliot was a well-known man in a county where tin mines abound. Had not his own enterprise been such a secret one, it would have been to Christopher Elliot, and not to Kemp, the "dowser," that he would have applied for confirmation of his beliefs about those coveted fields. And now here was Lawyer Sleeman bringing Christopher Elliot out to Trewint. Well, there was only one thing to be read from that.

He had gone down at once to his favourite place of dreams, and stood there waiting events with his arms leaning on the top rail of the gate to the fields. His anger rose in his heart with every long minute of waiting. If Lawyer Sleeman had brought Christopher Elliot with him, it was because that girl had suspicions about those fields, and had told the lawyer about them. And if the girl had suspicions, then it was from Bart that she had got them! Bart had betrayed him, betrayed his own father!

How Bart had come by the necessary knowledge, he never attempted to explain. His anger had robbed him of all powers of reasoning. It had always been his habit to share with his son all the details of his business about the farm, and now he forgot, in his wrath and disappointment, that this secret, this shameful secret, he had kept to himself.

Bart had betrayed him!

For the first moment he had been tempted to go and have it out with his son, but curiosity, an overpowering

desire to know whether or no hidden riches did, indeed, lie under that ground, kept him waiting for the arrival of the expert.

He heard their voices long before they came into view. This was no secret visit, under cover of the mist, at midnight, when the Zabuloe ghosts walk. But even though he made the mental comparison, he still did not feel any the less cheated. This had been *his* discovery! They were going to take away from him *his* hidden treasure!

From his post behind the hedges he watched the expert at work. Every movement he followed through the failing light. He saw pieces of rock carefully stored in the black box. All over the four fields went Christopher Elliot, followed by Clowance and the old lawyer, and the eyes of the watcher never left them.

When at last the three had gone on their way back to the house, the old man's back was aching. He was weary and cold, for the mist had begun to rise and it was late. But his anger was as fiery as ever. He shook himself impatiently like a dog, to get rid of his stiffness, and then set out for his farm—and his son!

Bart was not there when he arrived. He searched the rooms on the ground floor, the office, where the young man often worked in the evenings, trudged up the stairs, breathing hard, for he hated those steep stairs, and his breath was short these days. But Bart was not in his room. Zacky was already in bed, but Zacky knew nothing of his favourite's movements. The poor witless creature felt the anger in the air and cowered down in his bed, shivering.

Old Matthew Nancecullom was getting angrier and angrier each moment. What was his son doing out at this hour? He should be there when he was wanted! His absence was adding a new grievance for the old man, exasperated by his weariness and bitter disappointment. He sat huddled up in his chair, his ears alert for the sound of footsteps, his eyes on the doorway.

At last they came ! Weary, dragging footsteps ! The old man flung himself out of his chair and met his son at the doorway

“ And what have you to say for yourself ? ”

Bart looked up at the towering figure of wrath, standing in the doorway, while he was still at the bottom of the steps in front of the house. The light from the lamp dazed him a little, and he was worn out with the emotions of the evening.

“ I don't know what you're talking about,” he said roughly. “ Let me by. I'm tired out. I'm going to bed.”

“ Tired out, are you ? ” His father's voice was almost choked with anger. “ Tired out ? Well, you'll have to listen to me before you go to bed ” He made a gesture towards the sitting-room from which he had come, and then stood on one side. “ In there,” he said curtly.

Bart, too dispirited to care, nodded his head and went in. He had seen Clowance at the door of Trewint with her lawyer and a stranger. He had heard the words of that leave-taking and knew that he could never, now, clear his conscience. And Clowance would believe that he, too, had wanted to cheat her !

“ Well, dad, and what is it now ? ” he asked listlessly. He had hardly noticed the expression on his father's face. Nothing seemed to matter.

“ What is it ? *What is it ?* You ask me that ? You ? ” The farmer's voice was thick. He strode up to his son. Tall as was Bart, his father stood at least two inches higher, a veritable giant. “ How dared you betray your father ? ”

From utter lassitude to complete astonishment, such was the change that was worked by those words in Bart's mind. Betray his father ?

He laughed, a bitter laugh, which completed what the disappointment, the cold, the stiffness, the fatigue, the waiting had done. Matthew Nancecullom snatched up a riding crop from a table near his hand and hit his son savagely over the head, once, twice, and again.

The attack was utterly unexpected. Bart could make not the slightest attempt to defend himself, to ward off the blows. He fell like a log, without a sound.

The old man came suddenly to his senses.

What had he done? He had hit a defenceless man, and that man his son! He bent down, his old knees cracking rheumatically, and felt the heart. It was still beating. He loosened the collar and tie round the unconscious man's throat, placed a cushion under the injured head, and then shuffled off towards the kitchen in search of water.

When he returned Bart was smiling up at him, a feeble smile, but it made his heart beat with thankfulness.

"My boy! My boy!" he said again and again. "Can you forgive me? What would your mother have said?"

His jug of water stood neglected beside him as he knelt beside his son, murmuring, muttering, broken sentences, words, incoherent attempts to explain, to ask forgiveness, to reassure himself that Bart still lived. The young man lay quietly, still too far from real life to know just what was happening, a faint smile on his lips, saying nothing.

At last he roused himself, opened his half-shut eyes, and tried to lift his aching head.

"Since you've brought the water, Dad," he said in a far-away voice, "I could do with a drink!"

It was some time before he could get up and go to his room. He lay on the floor, his eyes closed, while his father sat and watched him in a silent agony of remorse.

How could his son have known? And if he had known, if he had found out and had warned Clowance Zabuloe, what else could he have done? His father had been trying to cheat that girl out of her heritage. If he had told her about the riches of Trewint fields, he had only done it to save his father's honour. Had he been *mad*, all these years, to try to make himself believe that because those fields had once belonged to Nancecullom Farm he had some claim to them still?

He had sent for the doctor, the young doctor from Bodmin who had attended old Benny Cowling, and it was after midnight when he heard the car draw up at the gate of the farm. As he led the way up to his son's room he wondered what he should say. Should he tell the truth? But his son saved him. He had fallen in the dark as he had come into the house, he told the doctor, slipping on the highly polished floor of the sitting-room, and had hit his head against the back of the chair.

Whether or no the young doctor believed the unlikely tale, he went about his work quickly and silently as usual.

"You're all right," he announced at last. "A few days in bed and you'll have forgotten all about it. But you *must* keep to your bed for those few days."

He gave a few instructions for the treating of the bruises, and then took his leave.

Matthew Nancecullom saw him to the door.

"Another eighth of an inch," said the doctor, in a queerly meaning voice, as he took his leave, "and your son would have been a dead man," he smiled, "and I think I should tell my servant not to polish the floors so highly. Good night!"

He panted up the steep stairs again.

"Dad!"

"My son!"

"This is the first time since mother died that I've been tempted to believe in a God who looks after us all."

The old man stood waiting for the explanation of this astounding statement. Bart had been an unbeliever for years, and he could see nothing in this evening's work to warrant such a change of front.

"I meant to tell her about you, Dad. I went along to Trewint to tell her, but I got there too late!"

"You meant to save me," said the old farmer.

"No. I meant to keep the Squire from getting her!" There was a deep bitterness in the feeble voice.

"Well, and why not?" the old man's voice was gruff.

"I'd never have forgiven myself if I'd made you out

a thief to work my own petty spite, dad. I came too late, but she knows, all the same."

"Yes, she knows."

The old voice was all resignation now.

"And I've not betrayed you, Dad!"

The old man smiled, and his lips moved, though it was too dim in the room for his son to see.

"And I've not killed you, my son!"

The words were spoken under his breath, too low for the injured man to hear. Matthew Nancecullom looked at the bandage.

"An eighth of an inch!" he muttered.

The bandaged head turned towards him.

"So maybe there's a God in Heaven to look after us, after all!"

The old farmer's lips were pursed. They twisted a little wryly.

"Maybe," he admitted, none too willingly.

CHAPTER XVIII

"FATHER" NANSLOWE

"Is that Miss Clowance?"

"Yes!"

Peter felt his heart beat at the sound of that clear voice and smiled at himself. What a fool a grown man can make himself about a bit of a girl!

"This is Peter Zabuloe, here. What do you say to a game of golf this morning?"

"This morning? That's most kind of you, but I'm afraid it's quite impossible. I've just heard that Bart Nancecullom's had a bad accident and I'm going down to see him."

Bart Nancecullom? That farmer fellow? Darn him! He tried to make his voice more warmly sympathetic than he felt.

"I say, that's bad luck! What is it?"

"He slipped down in their sitting-room on some very highly polished wood floor they have there. His head hit the back of a chair, and he's really rather bad. Slight concussion, his father says"

"Poor chap!" Peter dismissed the subject with a sigh. "Well, what about this afternoon?"

"No good, either, Sir Peter. It's my afternoon for visiting."

"In this perfect weather? Couldn't that be put off for another day? I've had such a brutal fortnight in town, and I'm simply longing for a good game on those links."

"You're sure to find plenty of partners." The girl

wasn't laughing, was she? "But my visiting can't be changed. It's a fixture."

"Oh, well! And to-morrow?"

"No luck! I've got to go in to Bodmin for business to-morrow, and it'll take me all day."

"What a nuisance! But perhaps I can take you in? I shall almost certainly be going to the links, in any case. I'm so out of practice that I must get a little exercise."

"Thank you very much. It's good of you to think of it, but I'm being fetched by my lawyer, Mr Sleeman. And he'll be bringing me back too," the gay voice added very quickly, before he could make the obvious suggestion.

"Indeed, I don't seem to be in luck," agreed Peter a little curtly, then, thinking better of his small show of incipient temper, "I suppose you won't be going to the tennis party at the Nancarrow's day after to-morrow?" he asked, more humbly than he cared to recognise.

"I was there only two days ago!"

Did he hear her laugh?

"Ah, well," he tried a very casual little laugh himself. "I shall have to look elsewhere for my partner. I do hope you'll find your injured man in fairly good shape!"

"I hope so, too! Thank you for ringing me up, Sir Peter. Good morning!"

So that was that!

Peter hung up the receiver very roughly, strode out of the small room where it was kept, and out on to the terrace. He felt he needed space.

Was that girl playing with him? That farmer fellow, was there anything in that? He brushed the thought angrily from him. He'd seen them together. There was nothing in that. But a worse thought protruded itself. Did she want to make him see that she wanted to have nothing more to do with him than she was obliged by the ordinary course of life in the district? Was it that?

It brought him up very short. This was a ridiculous position he'd got himself into. In love—he was bound

to admit it—with a girl of twenty, a country girl, not even really beautiful, as beauty was generally understood, with no cosmopolitan polish, no special knowledge or cleverness of any sort, nothing that ought to attract him. It was absurd to take any notice of her. The best thing he could do would be to leave her to herself, and show her that he didn't care one way or the other whether she played golf with him or went calling on Bart Nancecullom . . . or anything else, for that matter. If it really was a case of her playing with him, then she'd soon turn round and be pleasant and civil to him again. And if it wasn't ? If he'd been right in that other unpleasant explanation ? Well, the sooner he knew and made up his mind to it the better. It was always better than running round like a little dog after a mere child, after all !

And with that rather unsatisfactory conclusion he had to be content.

But content he was not.

He went golfing, he went to his tennis party, he wandered round his house and garden, trying to pretend to himself that he was happy and satisfied, but he was constantly having to push into the background the suggestions which his mind was for ever calling up of motive for a call at Trewint for telephoning down to see if . . .

He was relieved when he found, on his return from the tennis party at the Nancarrows that the Vicar of Trewint, " Father " Nanslowe, the Anglo-Catholic, was waiting for him. He had already been there almost an hour, Davey told him, and had just decided that he would go if the Squire didn't arrive in the next five minutes.

" He's in the lib'ry, Sir Peter. Ded'n know where to put 'en."

" That's all right, Davey. I shall ask him to stay and have supper with me. We'll have it under the trees at the back. As soon as your wife can get it ready, tell her "

" Very good, Sir Peter."

It would give him something to do, anyway, Peter

reflected, as he went to find his guest. There would probably be an argument, with that chap, and he was feeling rather in the mood for an argument that evening. It would take his mind off the fact that Clowance had been again to see that farmer Nancecullom, or so his gardener Berry had told him, casually, in giving him his daily account of the gossip in the village, and that on the day when she had said that she should be kept all day long in Bodmin on business.

"Good evening, Mr. Nanslowe!" He wasn't going to fall in with that ridiculous practice of calling the man "Father." "I'm afraid you've had a long wait. If I'd known you were coming I'd have hurried back."

The other man smiled wanly. He was a tall thin man of little more than Peter's own age, but appearing older on account of his thin, ascetic face, so pale and anæmic-looking. Underfed, thought Peter. And yet the beggar's decently paid. It's quite a good living. Fasting, perhaps.

"That's of no importance, Sir Peter," the other was saying. He had a pleasant voice, musical and clear, but it was marred by a gloomy drawl. "I had to call to speak to you, and as I was here and your man told me that you were expected back, and as it is really quite a long walk up from Trewint, I thought I'd venture to wait for you. I shan't keep you a minute of two. I know it must be nearly time for your evening meal."

"And yours!" laughed Peter heartily. "I hope you'll give me the pleasure of your company. I was just feeling I'd rather not be alone to-night, so your visit is a real godsend."

Nanslowe raised his eyebrows ever so slightly, and a faint smile spread over his thin lips.

"It's very good of you to suggest it, Sir Peter," he said, hesitating visibly

"Nonsense, I'm being good to myself" Peter could not help thinking of Marion Lanteglos, and wishing she were here to witness this new manifestation of her

"larger selfishness." "I shall be really delighted if you'll stay."

"I will," answered the other with a franker smile this time, "but I warn you that you'll not be pleased about what I came to tell you."

It was Peter's turn to raise his eyebrows

"No? Well, then, we'll leave it over until after supper. A cold meal, out of doors, if that suits you?"

"Admirably, thank you."

As the meal went forward—a charming meal, as were all those prepared by Mrs Davey, who was devoted to him, and delighted to spoil her master—Peter felt that his opinion was right. The poor chap was half starved. In any case, he ate like a man who knows how to appreciate good food but seldom gets it. Peter remembered that he was another bachelor. Lived with his mother. Probably stingy and given to good works.

In any case, the good food and excellent wine mellowed the man, who proved himself a pleasant companion, well-read, if on somewhat restricted lines. Peter was careful to keep away from topics likely to encourage discord. There was likely to be enough of that to fill his need for discussion in the subject the Vicar was to bring up after the meal should be over.

With a cup of coffee before him and a good cigar in his fingers, the guest smiled deprecatingly, and leaned a little forward.

"I feel almost guilty, after so delightful an evening, for having to broach this other subject, Sir Peter," he said, "but I did warn you."

"Oh, yes," laughed his host, "I was warned, and I'm quite prepared"

"I came to tell you that I'm very much afraid that I shan't be able to serve on that hospital committee."

It was very bluntly spoken, but it was easy to read in the brown eyes a look of utter discomfort, mental discomfort. The announcement had not been made gladly

"Ah! And may I ask you why?"

"Well——" Once more there was something in the hesitation that made it clear to Peter that this interview was really painful to his guest. "I'm afraid you may think me very narrow-minded, Sir Peter, but it is a matter that I must decide for myself. I do not feel that I can serve on a committee with schismatics."

"I see." Peter was not really surprised. He had expected something like this. And he was ready for argument. He looked up at the other man with a very charming smile. "Will you allow me to speak extremely frankly?"

Nanslowe flushed.

"I shall be very glad if you will. I do not object to frankness."

"Good. Then you must let me tell you that I consider your objection *as* narrow-minded. You speak of Mitchell and of Vivian as schismatics. My dear man, from the point of view of the Church of Rome, you are a schismatic yourself! Every Protestant is a schismatic. And"—he paused, and his smile broadened into something very near to a grin—"even looked at from the standpoint of the *official* Church of England, you are precious near to being a schismatic yourself!"

There was an angry frown on the other man's face.

"Really, Sir Peter, I cannot allow you to criticise my faith . . ."

"I'm not doing so. I very well might. I have some rather strong opinions about the position of Anglo-Catholicism inside the Church of England, but this isn't the time for me to air them. I'm merely asking you to be logical—and charitable."

"I had hoped that I was always that; the latter at least."

"You're not, sir."

The thin lips were drawn into an even thinner line.

"You forget, perhaps, that for me the Anglo-Catholic Church is the only true church, otherwise I should not belong to it."

" I'm not disputing that for an instant. To the Roman Catholics their church is the only true one, and *you* broke away. To you, as a churchman, the Church of England is the only true church, and the Nonconformists broke away "

" The case is not the same . . . "

" It is *precisely* the same, Nanslowe, and, what is more, there seems some danger lest you may find yourself in the position one day of having to choose between the *official* conception of the Church of England and having to break away yourself; become a schismatic, in fact "

The flush on the ascetic face deepened

" This is rather insulting," he began, in a voice which strove to be calm.

" I'm sorry. I've no intention of being insulting. I just want you to let me put before you the point of view of a plain man who's trying to see his way back towards the Christianity that he left behind him in his boyhood. The thing that strikes such a man is that there is less spirit of real charity and understanding between so-called Christians than almost anywhere else. If there is one thing which would keep such a man away from Christianity it is the eternal bickering of churchmen of all denominations about things which seem to the plain man to be utterly unessential—by comparison, I mean, with the *big* things of religion. I had to defend you, yourself, not so long ago, from the accusation of being an idolator. You call these other men schismatics. And you both seem to forget that you are utterly together in the basic fact of worshipping the same God, hoping for the same salvation through His death. You've each chosen what seems to you to be the right way to worship Him, but you can't allow the other to choose for himself. Frankly, the only real true Christians among the lot of you—in your attitude towards one another, I mean—are the Quakers."

" The Quakers! " There was the faintest note of

scorn in the tone of Nanslowe's expressive voice. "Well, they have no pretensions to being churchmen at all."

"Perhaps. But they are good Christians, for all that. Perhaps because of that!"

"I'm afraid we shall not see eye to eye in this matter." The clergyman made a great effort to master his rising anger. Peter had to admit to himself that he was behaving with admirable restraint under great provocation. "I must do what seems to me to be my duty and ask you to accept my resignation from that committee."

"Not yet, sir." Peter smiled back as amiably as ever. "I've not finished what I wanted to say—if you'll be so good as to listen to me? I admit that I'm being almost unpardonably outspoken, but it does seem to me that this question is worth thrashing out. If you resign from this committee we lose the support of your people . . ."

"Very few, I fear," was the somewhat bitter response.

"I know nothing about that. But I feel very strongly that a matter like this hospital should be entirely above all questions of creed. They don't really affect it. We're working for our little community as a whole, whether they happen to be church or chapel or Roman Catholic—or non-believers, for that matter! Everyone falls ill. I don't think Christ would have asked what a man's belief was before healing him, do you?"

The brown eyes met Peter's blue ones.

"No."

The word came out almost reluctantly.

"Well, then, I've been reading the New Testament a good deal lately. It's very beautiful literature, a very beautiful story, even if you only look at it from that standpoint. But what has struck me very forcibly is that Christ, throughout His teaching, was always insisting on the very *broadest* aspect of the rules and regulations of Judaism. You remember His version of the 'law and the prophets'? 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind, and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' And do

you remember His answer to those disciples who criticised a stranger who healed the sick in Christ's name yet was not His disciple ? ' He that is not against us is for us.' It seems to me that throughout His life He was always ready to welcome the *widest* views on all the problems of the day. It was the *spirit* that counted. Remember how He spoke of the laws about healing on the Sabbath Day. There was never a sign of strictness in His teaching. Love of God. That was what mattered. Look at His charity, His understanding, His forgiveness towards the woman taken in adultery, towards Mary Magdalene, towards the thief on the cross ! Can you *honestly* say that you believe *that* Christ would approve your petty scruples, your reasons for refusing to sit on the committee of a hospital with men you consider as schismatics ? Doesn't it seem to you to be out of all proportion ? "

" One must have one's faith, one's doctrine, and one must be true to one's beliefs," muttered Nanslowe, almost sulkily.

" But even if I were to admit that yours was the *only* true interpretation of religion—and I'm very far from doing so. I'm not prepared to say that *any one* interpretation is certainly and exclusively the right one. They may *all* be wrong, for all I know—but even admitting that you, and only you and those who think like you are right, can you *even then* maintain that you believe that Christ would approve such an attitude towards other men who honestly believe that they are worshipping Him in the way that their reason tells them is right ? Can you ? That Christ who said, ' He that is not against us is for us ' ? Come, Nanslowe ! Be broadminded. Stick to your own point of view—you must, if you're honest—but try to see the other side, too. *They* are as honest as you. Read the New Testament again, and if you're still obliged to take up the same attitude after that, I'll accept your resignation. But I don't believe I'll have to ! And now, another point. We've got to have a women's committee. Whom do you suggest from your people ? We're

purposely not asking ladies from your own households. Neither Mrs. Vivian nor Mrs. Mitchell nor Miss Holman, so I won't ask Mrs. Nanslowe. We shall want her help, of course, but I don't think on that committee. We want people from the villages."

"From Trewint?" Nanslowe was very tentative.

"Yes"

"Then I think Miss Zabuloe would be the best"

"Ah, but I had thought of asking her for Clowance village. She has always been to that church because of its close association with the Manor," he felt himself blushing as he thought of that, "and the Canon seemed to think it would be suitable."

"I see. Then Miss Baggott."

Peter hesitated again.

"Isn't she . . ."

Nanslowe smiled somewhat bitterly.

"As narrow as her priest? Perhaps you're right. Well, I'll reflect, and if I decide to remain on the committee myself I'll bring you another name then. But I promise nothing."

"I'm not afraid," Peter told him genially. "I'm perfectly certain that you're going to help us."

The guest got to his feet.

"Well," he said, holding out his hand, "I've had a more than interesting evening, Sir Peter. You've given me some very straight talk, and I shall certainly think over what you've said. It's a point of view. It isn't fresh, I suppose, really, but it's a very long time since I looked at things from quite that angle, I'll admit. Good night, and thank you. I—I've enjoyed myself!"

Peter watched the thin figure disappear down the dark drive. A poor lonely chap! He remembered that empty church on Easter morning. He was certainly sincere. There could be no doubt of that. And intelligent. Well, it was a queer business!

He turned back to the house and went in at the window of the long drawing-room, still hung with pale green

brocade, but no longer darned and patched. Marion Lanteglos had seen that the proportions of that room would fit admirably with the delicacy and dignity of the Adams period. Some past Zabuloe had fitted a lovely Adams grate into the place of the old fire-place there, and it had inspired her to live up to it. The room had answered to the treatment beyond her dreams. It was a lovely room. And Clowance Zabuloe, the woman who so closely resembled *his* Clowance Zabuloe, gazed down from above the Adams grate.

The artist must have idealised the original, or else in her youth the murderess had shown no hint of what she must have become, for the girl who hung there, looking down at him, was very sweet, if proud and shy. Peter's heart was full as he looked at her. She was so much the mistress he longed for to rule the Manor—and him! She seemed a sweeter, more malleable Clowance than the girl at Trewint who had mocked him over the telephone three days ago. Unless he had been wrong? unless she *had* been engaged on all those days and *could* not accept his invitations?

He turned away quickly, his mind made up. He had resisted too long. This time he would *not* thrust away the perfectly good excuse that had come to him to go and call on her. It wasn't too late. Nine o'clock! With his car he could be there in a few minutes. He'd catch up the vicar and take him home and then call in to ask her about that hospital committee. An excuse? He knew it was an excuse, but he was in no mood to care. He *must* know where he stood . . . even if he stood outside the gates of happiness!

CHAPTER XIX

"LA FEMME DISPOSE"

THE moon was full, a harvest moon, and it was so light that Peter felt his headlights to be almost useless.

He picked up the Vicar of Trewint half-way down the drive and swept him back to his house almost before the poor man could have time to accept the invitation, said good-bye with the scantiest possible delay, and had drawn up at Trewint House gates a moment after. It couldn't be too late to pay his call!

Adam greeted him with his usual grin of welcome.

"Miss Clowance is in the garden, zur," he announced confidentially; "she've bin havin' her supper daown under the big cedar tree. Will you go straight to her, or shall I go and tell 'er you're come?"

"Oh, I'll go straight down, thank you, Adam," said Peter casually. He didn't want to risk being told that the mistress was not at home—to him! "I know the way."

Adam scratched the back of his head as he went back to the kitchen, where Zillah was waiting to know who the late caller could be.

"'Tis the Squire," he told her, with a meaning grin. "Gone daown to find 'er under the cedar tree."

"H'm!" was Zillah's only comment.

"Do'ee think he've come to aask 'er, Zillah?"

His wife looked up at him scornfully.

"H'm!" she jerked her head back towards the open window behind her. "This time o' night, an' a full moon?"

Adam nodded.

"Ess! An' will she taake 'en, do 'ee think, Zillah?"

"She'll be a fool ef she doesn't," was her curt comment.

"Ah, but will she?"

"Oh, don't bother me with all yer questions, Adam Richards," she said impatiently, "I've no patience with 'ee."

Adam's face fell.

"I was afraad so," he said, in a melancholy tone.

"Afraad o' what, ye silly man?"

"Afraad she'd be sayin' no to the Squire. They'd ha' made such a handsome couple too!"

Zillah got up and pushed her husband before her out of the room.

"You get on with that silver! You're all behind, with yer harvestin' an' all. You leave Miss Clowance to manage 'er own affairs. Ef she taakes the Squire she'll do a good bit o' business, an' ef she doesn't, well, she'll have 'er own good reasons, you may be sure. You get that silver polished. It's a disgraace to the house!"

And Adam, being a good husband and a good servant, did as he was bid.

* * * *

Peter made his way down the moonlit garden with a horrible sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. It was much the same sort of feeling as he had had when going to see his head master after a scrape at school. And it was useless to jeer at himself. He knew well enough how foolish he was, but it changed nothing of his feelings.

He walked over the grass and made hardly a sound, but John, the roan spaniel, heard him, and left his mistress to come and greet him. He had always been a great favourite with dogs, and John had early singled him out for special favours. Peter had noticed that Clowance had often been none too pleased at the welcome which her dog would give him.

"John! Where have you gone, Johnny?"

The soft voice he loved called through the dusk.

The spaniel left him, after leaping up against him, and trotted obediently back to the girl.

"What is it, boy?"

"It was I, Miss Clowance. I've just been taking Mr. Nanslowe back to his house, and thought you would perhaps allow me to come and speak to you a few minutes about something. It arises out of my conversation with the vicar, so I thought I might as well get it settled at once. You seem so very occupied in the daytime, these last few days, that I hoped that I might be luckier in the evening."

Clowance had got hastily to her feet. She had been lying in a hammock-chair when he came upon her, just out of the shadow of the great cedar of Lebanon, and the moon was streaming down on to her white frock, making her look almost ethereal in that thin, cool light.

"Sir Peter!"

There was something breathless in her tone

"Yes Will you forgive me for disturbing you? You did look so peaceful"

"I—I was rather tired. It's been so hot to-day."

"Then please get back into that comfortable chair. I feel a brute to have come about such a subject now."

The girl motioned him to another chair and sank back into her own.

"Of course not! Lie down, John!" The dog was fawning on his friend, and his mistress's voice sounded almost sharp. "You mustn't let him be a nuisance, Sir Peter," she said. "Come here and lie down quietly, John."

The spaniel left the man's side reluctantly. Peter thought he saw a frown on the girl's face. A bad sign, but he had gone too far to turn back.

"I came to ask you," he began, hesitating a little, "if you will serve on the special women's committee for the hospital. I've been trying to get all the clergymen together, to serve on the committee, with a few local

people of importance, substantial people like old Matthew Nancecullom, and then I thought it would be a good idea to have a really practical committee to do the real work, and to get the women to look after that. What do you think ? ”

“ About the committee ? A very good idea. Your clergy will fight all the time. *They* won’t be much use to you ! Will they even all sit together ? Have you asked them ? ”

She smiled mischievously at him.

“ Yes,” he smiled back, “ and I’ve got ’em all, I think. I’ve had a pretty straight argument with Nanslowe this evening, but I think I shall get him. The others are all right.”

“ Really ? Then I congratulate you ! That’s a real triumph. And about the women. Who have you got ? ”

“ I’m asking you first,” he admitted. “ I wanted to be able to say that you’d serve, and I thought perhaps you’d help me choose the others, and perhaps persuade them to accept, too. Will you ? ”

For a long minute the girl said nothing. Peter watched her face. She was staring into space, and her eyes seemed to glint in the moonlight like deep pools of water.

“ Where are these meetings to be held ? ”

The words came slowly, almost reluctantly. Peter felt that there was something important behind them, and realised in a flash what it must be. This was to be a test for him.

“ I had thought that it would be best to hold them at the Manor,” he said in a firm voice, “ as there is so much bickering in the villages about their relative importance, all these religious differences and all the rest of it. That would cut out all argument of that sort.”

He watched her again as he waited for her answer.

“ I will serve on the committee, Sir Peter,” she said at last, “ but I should be very much obliged if the meetings could be held elsewhere than at the Manor.”

Her tone was very cold and deliberate.

Peter sighed.

"I'm tremendously glad you accept," he said, "but very sorry that you don't want to come to my house."

Almost unconsciously he had put the slightest possible stress on the last two words.

Clowance turned and looked directly at him for the first time since he had come out there to see her.

"Because it *is* your house, Sir Peter," she answered very quietly.

He deliberately ignored her words.

"I do so want you to see it," he hurried on, almost feverishly. "I want you to approve of it. It really is lovely. You can have no idea. Marion Lanteglos is an artist. She has a real love of old things, you know, and perfect taste. She has kept the spirit of the place intact, and just restored it to its old glory. I'm sure that it can never have looked more lovely. It is dignified and yet homely. It's rich without being garish or vulgar. I'm so proud of it, I can't tell you! You'll know something of what I feel, for you're a Zabuloe, too. But I've been so long a wanderer on the face of the earth, with nowhere to belong to, that to find this home of my people, so much the home a man must dream of, and to be able to do for it what it needed, has been a marvellous experience. And I do so want you to approve. I know you will! It has been a great disappointment to me that you would never come to see Zabuloe, not even when I was away. Marion told me she had asked you. I told her to. I thought that perhaps you'd go when I wasn't there. I *needed* to know that you approved, Clowance!" He used her name without realising that he had done so, so carried away was he by what he was saying, by his pleading, for it was nothing less. "It's your home, too. I felt I *must* know that you liked it—all that we had done there. Won't you come and see it?"

He had tried to read her face. It had seemed very

pale, but the silvery light had given an unearthly look to the whole world that night. There was nothing to be read in those wide eyes, so dark in the misty pallor around them, and under the shadow of her dusky curls

"And what should it matter to me, what you may have done to the home that you took from me?"

The cold tones should have warned him, but he was in no mood to heed them.

"Because I want you to care, Clowance. Because I want you to come back to Zabuloe. Because I want you to share it with me. We're the last two of our race, you and I, and we ought to live together in that beautiful house—together, you and I. Your ancestor—and mine!—the Clowance who turned that other Peter Zabuloe, her own son, away from the Manor, is hanging over the fire-place in the long green drawing-room. It's still all in green, that room, you know. And I never think she looks like a murderess, Clowance. I don't believe the old story is true. I think that poor Peter Zabuloe killed himself because he could no longer bear to live, since she loved him no more. She looks so cool and sweet. I can imagine that life would be a bitter thing if she took away her love from a man. She looks like the girl I love, Clowance, cool and sweet, and just a little shy, and sometimes I think that she smiles at me when I go in there to look at her, and I like to believe that she's promising me that you'll come back some day to live at the Manor with me! Will you, Clowance?"

The moon had gone behind a cloud, and it was very dark. He could no longer see her face, but he could hear her breathing, very fast. What did it mean? He tried to take her hand, but it was drawn roughly away.

"No!"

"Clowance, you don't . . ."

"No! I won't share the Manor with you! If that other woman smiles at you, it's not to tell you that I'll come back to live there with you. It's because she knew I wouldn't. You took my home from me . . ."

"But I want to give it back to you!"

"And I won't take it! Do you think I can forget? I begged you to let me live on in my old home. I—I believe I even cried! Before you! And even that didn't move you! You, a stranger, coming from the end of the world, to whom Zabuloe *could* only be a beautiful old house, like any other beautiful old house, you turned me out of my home, where I'd lived all my life, where my father and my grandfathers for generations had lived. For a mere fancy! And you think I can forget that and come meekly back and *share* it with you?"

Peter got up from his chair with a sigh, shaking his broad shoulders as if he were getting rid of a heavy weight.

"Yet it was that same Clowance who threw *us* out in the first place," he said casually, with a little short laugh. "I come from the older branch, you know, and I suppose I might really claim to have the better right to Zabuloe, if it were worked out logically. It was rather a pretty stroke of Fate, I think, to send me down to get my rights back. It's a pity This will be the end of the house of Zabuloe, I suppose I'm the last man of the house."

The girl was standing, too. She threw back her curls and laughed back at him.

"But there are a lot of other women in the world. You don't need to marry a Zabuloe to carry on the line!"

He had been turning away, but he stopped suddenly and looked down at her. The cloud had drifted away and it was very bright again.

"No," he said very gently, "no. I don't need to marry a Zabuloe to carry on the line. But I could only marry a woman I loved. And the woman I love won't marry me."

Without another word he strode away across the grass. Clowance stood still.

She watched him until he was out of sight, and then,

her hands hanging limply at her sides, she turned back towards the two chairs under the tree. They looked so lonely there, and so empty. The spaniel, beside her, had also watched the departing figure, making little noises and twitching his little feathery stump of tail in the grass. He longed to follow Peter, and the girl knew it. Now that the man was out of sight, John put his cold damp muzzle in the hollow of her hand.

" Don't, John ! "

Suddenly she flung herself into the cushions on the hammock chair and burst into sobs, while her dog, in an agony of sympathy, tried to push his cold nose against her cheek.

CHAPTER XX

PREPARATIONS

PETER left the next morning for London.

A kind Fate had sent him an urgent request for an important consultation, so that he could go without feeling that he was running away, but he was very thankful for the excuse, for the very idea of staying at Zabuloe for another day just then was anathema to him. Later on, he knew, it would be all right, but at the moment he could not face the risk of meeting Clowance in the villages, the lanes, at their friends' houses, on the links. Work, hard work, was what was needed, and Fate had kindly supplied it.

But he could not neglect Zabuloe altogether. The day for the Squire's Birthday Party was approaching. He had managed to secure a promise from Bill and Marion Lanteglos that they would be there to help him. The hospital scheme was going rapidly forward, and it was an excellent excuse for Bill to come and examine the various sites which he had proposed, and to talk over plans with Doctor Warner, the young man whom Peter had called in to attend to Benny Cowling, and who had been of enormous help in the matter of the hospital scheme, giving advice about equipment and all other technical details, and backing up Peter in his discussions with his friend, who might have been tempted to sacrifice utility to beauty a little too frequently.

Marion had undertaken the task of sending out the invitations. She had made a host of friends in the three villages, and could be trusted to see to it that no one

should be forgotten. She it was who received and classified the answers, and made arrangements with caterers. Bill took charge of bands and all such details, and had got together a group of young men to organise the sports, the cricket match and the dancing.

It was to be a marvellous party !

Peter was working like a slave. Hard work suited him at all times, but just now it was a drug. He was angry with himself for caring, but scoff as he might, he felt unutterably depressed, miserable and, above all, lonely. He had allowed himself to count on that thought of Clowance at Zabuloe, the idea of sharing his home with her, and the knowledge that he must make up his mind to live there alone had made the great house seem empty almost beyond bearing. It had a ghost !

In the long green drawing-room the blue eyes of the long dead Clowance Zabuloe followed him round. He was more and more sure that he had been right, and that that ancestor of his, the first Protestant Zabuloe, had killed himself and not been killed by that sweet girl with her faint hint of a smile. He was always finding an excuse for going into that room when he was in the house, and always he would stand and gaze at the portrait above the fire-place. She *did* smile, and her smile *did* promise him happiness.

But of the living Clowance he saw nothing. Marion told him, one day when he had come down, eagerly, from London, somehow expecting that good news would be waiting for him, that she had received Clowance's answer to the invitation to the famous party—a refusal, the only one ! Miss Zabuloe would be unable to come. Miss Zabuloe would be away from Trewint at the time on business.

"Business ? What on earth has the girl got in the way of business to take her away ?" asked Bill, astonished. "It would have been more civil to have put off buying the extra cows or sheep or pigs, or whatever it was, until

another day. After all, the girl's a Zabuloe, and old Peter's the head of the house. It's rotten bad form."

Peter smiled a little wanly. He thought he understood the reason which prompted Clowance to have business away from Trewint on just that day. And the very fact that "old Peter was head of the house" was not unconnected with it!

He was very fully occupied himself. His work in Town—and he had accepted much more lately—was most absorbing, and now that Bill had been persuaded to choose a site for the hospital, there were legal matters connected with that which took up much of his time.

He came across an annoying little contretemps there.

He had decided that he would give the land and the hospital to his beloved villages, but with a permanent body of trustees to run it. He was afraid lest, after his death, there should happen to be a period when the villages could no longer count on their body of clergymen, and the occupant of the Manor might not be interested. The villages themselves would probably not boast many people capable of running such an enterprise on sound lines. There were possibilities of jealousies and quarrels. So he went to Bodmin one day to get the advice of his lawyers on the subject.

Old Mr Sleeman looked at the scheme he had drawn up, his eyebrows lifted and his lips pursed.

"I think you must have forgotten, Sir Peter," he said at last, "that you are not yet the *absolute* owner of the Manor and all its lands."

Peter frowned.

"What's this? I don't think I quite understand," he began.

"That clause, you'll remember," the old lawyer smiled mildly with his mouth, but there was a queer malicious twinkle in his eyes, "in our late client's will. If Miss Clowance Zabuloe can find the money within ten years of

the date of your purchase, she is entitled to buy back the Manor from you "

" But surely," Peter hesitated, " I don't wish to say anything unpleasant, but it is surely only a very *theoretical* right ? "

" Maybe, maybe," the old head was nodded sagely, " but with a man in your profession, Sir Peter, I surely don't have to point out the necessity of respecting the law to the last comma. You have no right to dispose *definitely* of the smallest particle of the estate until the end of those ten years. You could, of course," he added blandly, " approach Miss Clowance Zabuloe in this particular instance. I think I may venture to say that I feel sure that there would be no difficulty at all in obtaining her agreement. But it is a formality that you cannot neglect. It won't do to forget that."

For a minute or two Peter was silent. He'd forgotten all about that clause ! Of course, knowing the state of the finances of the Manor when he had bought it, and the unlikelihood of making any fortune out of farming, he had paid little attention to it at the time of his purchase. There was so little possibility of Clowance getting together the first twenty-five thousand pounds, without even thinking of the considerable sums that he had spent in doing up the house and grounds. Of course, the old chap was right. He *had* no right to dispose of the land, and he must ask Clowance about it ! An awkward business !

" Well, Mr. Sleeman," he said at length, " perhaps you would be so good as to approach Miss Zabuloe about the matter for me ? "

The bushy grey brows went up.

" I ? Surely it would be more natural for you to explain it to her, Sir Peter ? "

The Squire flushed uncomfortably. Was the old man being purposely difficult ?

" I should be obliged if you would look after it for me," he insisted ; " I'm very little down here myself

these days. I've a great deal to keep me in Town, and when I *am* here my friends at the Manor keep me hard at it with the arrangements for this garden-party of mine."

"Ah, yes! The Squire's party! A great event."

"I hope we shall see you there, Mr. Sleeman? Keast tells me he shall be able to come. Time is getting short, you know, and I'd rather thought it would be a good idea to get in some sort of ceremony, like cutting the first turf, or laying a stone or two, on that afternoon. The whole thing's been hanging around rather a long time, and I want it settled. I should be grateful if you'd try to get Miss Zabuloe's formal consent as soon as you can, and then we'll get to work."

"Very well! I'll do what I can. I'll do what I can. But I still feel it might have been more—gracious for you to have taken the matter up with Miss Clowance Zabuloe yourself. These young ladies, you know, Sir Peter . . ." the old voice trailed off, but the glance from under the grey brows was very keen.

Peter, however, was impatient. He saw nothing.

"Very well. That's settled. I'm leaving for Town in the morning and shan't be back till early next week. If you'd be so good as to telephone my friend Lanteglos at the Manor as soon as it's all fixed up?"

"Ve-ry well."

Lawyer Sleeman saw his visitor out to the street door, and then went straight back to his office and telephoned to Trewint House.

Two days later Bill Lanteglos received from the lawyer a correctly worded letter telling him that Miss Zabuloe had agreed to the gift of the land for a hospital, and enclosing a copy of her letter to Sleeman and Keast to this effect.

"Honestly, Marion," said Bill indignantly, "I've seldom seen anything like it! The whole tone of this letter! 'In this exceptional case' . . . 'in view of the

cause which it is to serve' . . . You'd really think the girl still owned the place!"

"Well, from what Peter told us," commented his wife, "she *has* some sort of a lien on it until the end of these precious ten years. And I expect she likes to think that she'll some day buy it back."

Bill snorted his scorn.

"With the fortune she's going to make out of her farm, I suppose. Still, hope springs eternal, and all that sort of thing."

Marion looked at her husband reproachfully.

"*Must* you, Bill?" she asked gently.

And he grinned back at her.

The next day they had fresh cause for indignation. They received a polite note from Mr. Sleeman to tell them that, owing to an important business engagement, he also would be unable to attend the Squire's Birthday Party.

"H'm. Well, he's at least had the decency to say that he 'regrets,' which is more than the girl did. Though why they couldn't arrange their business engagements for another day I can't see. They had long enough notice."

But those were the only two refusals. The villages were coming in force. No one talked of anything else.

Even Bart Nancecullom had accepted.

That young man's injury had proved to be more serious than had been anticipated. The wounds themselves had been quickly healed, but Bart had been left listless and weak. He had seemed not merely willing, but eager, to follow the doctor's orders and lie in bed, and not only for a few days, but for several weeks after the "accident." His father had been in a great state about him, and had worried Doctor Warner's head off with his constant telephone calls, only to be told that he must have patience. Time would do all that was needed.

Bart would hardly see anyone. Even Clowance was hardly allowed to see him. Her visits were always cut

very short, and Zacky proved an excellent watch-dog over his beloved master.

When he had come down into the world again, Bart had wandered around the farm, speaking to no one, avoiding even his father, but the old man often noticed his son holding long conversations with Zacky, and wondered what his boy could find to say to the poor half-wit when he had nothing to say to his father.

Matthew Nancecullom had passed through a hard time. That awful evening when he had struck his son had been a terrible shock to him in more ways than one. It had revealed to him just what he had been attempting to do for so many long months, putting it in the clearest, most unmerciful light before his conscience. His was a simple soul, and that evening had been a positive revelation to him of the depths to which he believed himself to have sunk. In his youth, and, indeed, up to the time of the birth of Bart, he had been a regular chapel-goer. His wife, as her son had said in talking to Clowance, had been a saint, and the invalid life of suffering which she had had to bear after her boy's arrival in the world had utterly embittered Matthew's heart, and turned him against all religion. He had never failed to speak bitterly of it to his son, and the boy had grown up as unbelieving as his father.

And now Matthew saw in the happenings of that night a definite warning to himself and to Bart. He had begun to attend the fiery services of Mr Mitchell, and often spoke to his son about his new feelings on the subject.

"It's been piling up, Bart," he said one evening after a particularly impressive sermon from his favourite parson, "all these years it's been piling up against me, and against you, too. But you're not as much to blame as I am. I led you astray by my talk. All these years I've been leading you away from salvation. Your mother always pleaded with me to be silent when you were there, to let you grow up as she'd have had her son grow up, a sound Christian. But I was bitter and proud,

and the Devil had got a good hold on me. Think how he's worked in me all this time! If I'd robbed that girl . . ."

"You couldn't," was Bart's curt comment.

"No! You'd have saved me! I can see that, now, but I was as near to doing it as could well be! See how I turned on you! I pray and pray to be forgiven . . ."

Bart shifted unhappily in his chair. He'd heard all this so many times lately, and it was getting on his already overstrung nerves.

"Why, Dad, let's leave it alone!" he exclaimed wearily. "You didn't do it, and you couldn't have done it, when it came to the point. It wasn't in you. I'd never have had to tell her. Don't you believe it! I know you. If it makes you any happier to turn good chapel-goer, that's all right, but don't go trying to make yourself out worse than you are. It won't do you any good, nor me either. But I wish we knew what Miss Clowance was doing about those fields!"

The farmer looked hard at his son.

"I do know. Anyway, she's had another pack of experts over a matter of a week ago. Up-country folk. Not anyone from round here. And I know that Christopher Elliot found tin in the fields. At least, that's what I heard over to Bodmin last week, though not a soul could tell me any more. I tried to get at that lawyer, Keast. But I don't think he knows. I'd have had it out of him if he had. He doesn't do all the girl's business any more. He's all on the Squire's side, is Keast. Old Sleeman looks after the girl's interests, and there isn't an oyster that can compete with old lawyer Sleeman for closeness."

Bart sighed.

"Oh, well, it'll make no difference to us one way or another."

"I suppose not." His father knocked out his pipe. "But I wish I could interest you in serious things, my son. Your mother would have wished it too, you know."

His tone was almost wistful, but Bart's smile was not encouraging. His mood of the night of his "accident" had not endured.

But he was brooding over something, of that his father was convinced, and no ruse of his had been of any use in trying to get at the root of it all. It was a constant grief to him to see his son moping round, always in the company of poor witless Zacky, and to be able to do nothing to help.

He would have been astonished if he could have heard some of those one-sided conversations. Bart's mind was still full of Clowance, still yearning for her, still hopeless of ever gaining her love, and still jealous of the difference between himself and Peter Zabuloe. He had found in Zacky the audience he needed. It eased his poor haunted mind to pour out his troubles and sorrows to Zacky, secure in the knowledge that not a word would ever be repeated to another soul. Zacky was as loyal as his dog and as incapable of repeating what he heard.

So, day after day, he would tell his queer companion of his love for the girl at Trewint, of his growing hatred and jealousy of Peter. He had trained the poor creature to find out what Clowance did each day, where Peter was and how he filled his days when he was in Cornwall. No one thought Zacky's questions odd. He had always been curious, and Clowance had always been a favourite with him. It seemed natural that he should be interested in the Squire's movements. Wasn't everyone?

And Bart, staying inside his own farmstead, yet kept in touch with all the movements of Peter and Clowance, as far as Zacky's skilled and careful spying could find them out, and he rejoiced to know that the two no longer met to talk in the lanes. If they passed each other by chance, they now only bowed or smiled, with hardly a word more than the most formal greeting between them. Clowance had never been to the Manor, that he knew, and from that he drew his greatest hopes. And Peter was

more often in London these last weeks. That was a good sign, too.

But Bart was not happy, and his father often saw with anxiety the dark rings round his son's eyes, and the over-bright glint in them sometimes as he sat staring moodily into space.

CHAPTER XXI

THE PARTY

PETER profited by the fact that he had Marion Lanteglos at the Manor to act as hostess for him, to ask to one big dinner-party all those kind people who had welcomed him to the county, all his new acquaintances of the golf club at whose houses he had lunched and dined and played tennis, and to whom he wished to return hospitality.

Clowance, of course, was asked, but as the dinner-party had been timed for the eve of the big Squire's Birthday Party, so as to utilise the services of the caterers and servants specially engaged for that great occasion, Peter was not too surprised to receive another refusal. He could not conceal his disappointment from Marion, however, and he had more than a suspicion that that clear-sighted woman was aware that the course of true love was not running smooth for him. Nothing was said, however, but it took away much of Peter's pleasure at the sight of the long table glittering with silver and crystal in the light of its many candles to know that Clowance was not to sit among the guests.

Thirty people sat down to table that evening. Thanks to Marion's genius for organisation and Mrs. Davey's equally great talent for cooking, the meal was a great success, though Peter was frequently much amused to see the strain of anxiety on Davey's worthy face as he tried to assert his authority over his hired helpers, and to pretend that he had been accustomed to serve such

banquets all the days of his life. There were moments when Marion met his eyes from the other end of the table, and exchanged a smile with him, and he felt a twinge at his heart to think that he had no charming, understanding wife with whom to share such moments. Bill was a lucky devil!

It was when the ladies had withdrawn to the long green Adams room and left the gentlemen to their port, that Peter first noticed a special atmosphere which had escaped him during the earlier part of the dinner. It was something which he could not explain, but which made him feel vaguely uncomfortable. He was being examined with a queer curiosity by some of his guests at moments when they thought that his attention was taken elsewhere. There were little murmurs of conversation spoken in low tones, which escaped him. Glances came his way which were not easy to interpret.

Then, as the port was started on its second round, came a little incident.

Major Trewint, a remote cousin of Clowance, to whose house he had often been asked, held up his glass from the other end of the table where he sat, and raised his voice to reach Peter.

"Travelled well, your port, Sir Peter," he said.

Peter smiled.

"No, Major," he corrected him, "it hasn't travelled at all. I took the port over with the house, you know. I should say it hasn't been moved since it was laid down, until it was brought up for us to drink this evening. It's a beautiful wine, isn't it? I have a lot to thank the past Zabuloes for"

The Major's eyebrows went up.

"Took it over with the house? Do you mean to say that Clowance didn't take any with her to Trewint?" he asked.

"No, sir"

"Well, well! And yet the girl has a pretty taste in wine. An educated palate."

"Perhaps she wasn't offered any," laughed his son, a little maliciously.

He was not a great favourite with his host, young Walter Trewint, but Peter answered amiably enough.

"Oh, she could have had what she wanted in that way, of course," he said, "but perhaps she has a cellar at Trewint already."

The Major made a grimace.

"A cellar? Well, if you were kind you might call it a cellar, but it wouldn't compare with the Zabuloe cellar. But maybe she didn't think it worth while to shake it all up. It takes time for good wine to get over a move. And, after all," he shrugged his shoulders and made a grimace, "why move it, when . . ."

Farther down the table someone coughed noisily, and the Major, with a twisted grin in that direction, broke off suddenly. Another guest quickly, almost too quickly it seemed to Peter, started another subject of conversation.

But a strained atmosphere remained.

When they had joined the ladies it seemed very natural that he should be asked to show his guests the house. One of the older women suggested it, and Peter willingly complied. Some of his joy came back as he led the party from room to room and heard the exclamations of admiration and delight with which each was greeted.

"It almost looks as if you had lived here all your life, Sir Peter," someone said with enthusiasm. "You've just caught the very spirit of the place—and the whole house looks just as it did in the good days when I was a girl. Even better. You've collected some beautiful pieces"

"That is not due to me, Mrs. Nancarrow," said Peter, putting a hand through Marion's arm and drawing her forward. "I owe all this beauty to my friend, Mrs. Lanteglos."

"And to her unworthy husband," laughed Bill, knowing how his wife must be hating this embarrassing moment, and turning the attention deliberately to himself to relieve her, "because I'm responsible for the plumbing and the electric light and the bathrooms and so on. I simply can't get Peter to appreciate my part properly, but I assure him that he would not be so keen on the rest if I hadn't done it."

"And what does Clowance say to it all?"

Peter flushed angrily. It was young Walter Trewint who had spoken, and he could see a meaning smile on the young man's face.

But it was Marion who answered for him.

"Neither Sir Peter nor I have yet been able to persuade her to come and look over the Manor," she said in her charming soft tones. "It seems such a pity, for she could have given us so much help, and we both wanted so much to make the place just as it should be."

"Oh, well," came a quick rejoinder, "she'll soon be able to change anything she doesn't like. That won't take her long!"

And once more a well-meaning person hastily changed the conversation.

Bridge in the library, and conversation round the wood fire which the chill of the September evening made most welcome in the green drawing-room, filled the rest of the evening. Peter was acutely unhappy. It was impossible not to notice that there was an undercurrent to the whole of this evening, an undercurrent which was partly almost hostile, it seemed to him, and partly tinged with pity.

Why pity?

Did all these friends of his realise that he had failed in his greatest wish, and that Zabuloe must be without a mistress? Yet those references to Clowance had not seemed to point that way. It had been in them that the latent hostility had sounded. Walter Trewint, he had often thought, was in love with his distant cousin. Yet

that made the sneers in the voices of father and son all the more inexplicable, their words inappropriate. Unless by hinting at a possible victory they had wished to make his failure all the more bitter?

They had their last hit at him as they left.

They were the last to go, and Peter stood out on the terrace seeing them into their car which, contrary to all his instructions, had driven up to the front door, leaving an evil little patch of oil which Davey's eye had caught and openly deplored.

"Well, it has been a delightful evening, Sir Peter," said the Major, smiling blandly as he shook hands with his host. "Zabuloe is a wonderful old house, and you've made it into a positive gem. There isn't a more beautiful place in the county, I should say, now that it's been done up and furnished so splendidly. A show place, and yet a thorough home. Delightful!"

Peter glowed. Perhaps he had been unduly sensitive and had read too much into those chance remarks.

"Top-hole!" remarked Walter, with his faintly superior manner which could prove so exasperating. "Grounds, too. Must have cost a pot of money."

"Magnificent!" There was something vaguely complacent in the voice which it was hard to explain. "A positive county seat!" Major Trewint looked hard and almost insolently at Peter. Standing there in the moonlight it was impossible to miss the expression on that red face with its slightly protruding eyes. "It would be very hard to leave such a place, Sir Peter! Very hard, indeed!" He held out his hand again. "Well, we must not keep you any longer. Good night, and all our thanks for this most delightful evening!"

Peter stood staring after the red light of their tail-lamp as it disappeared down the drive.

"Very hard to leave such a place!"

Indeed! It would! But why say that to him?

He shrugged his broad shoulders and turned back to

the house, but on the doorstep he paused and looked back across the terrace.

The moon was gleaming on the water of the pool around the fountain, and casting a sheen on the broad paving-stones of the terrace. In front of him was the low wall with its wide steps leading to the sweep of the lawn down to the river. On that wall Clowance had sat that November afternoon, saying good-bye to her home ! The home he had bought, the home he had taken away from her !

“ Very hard to leave such a place ! ”

He was right, that Major Trewint.

That November day Clowance Zabuloe had been indifferent to him, if she had not been actively distasteful, after her treatment of himself. Now that he knew and loved her, all the pain and sorrow which must have swept over her on that evening came over him. He could realise now what it must have meant to her to know that he, a stranger, was to buy the Manor.

And yet she would not come back !

She must hate him still. He had taken Zabuloe, he owned his beloved Manor, but in getting it he had lost all chance of the one happiness which now seemed to him to outweigh all others.

If he *gave* it back to her, without conditions, would she then forgive him ?

And with that thought in his mind he went into the house. It must wait until after to-morrow, and then he would have time to think it out, but to-night even the possession of Zabuloe tasted bitter in his mouth, so long as Clowance would not live there with him.

He locked the great front door and went across the hall, where the portraits of dead Zabuloes glowered down upon him. In the green drawing-room he stood once more gazing at the girl who looked down from above the fire-place.

She smiled, and her smile promised him happiness. Nothing would persuade him that her presence did

not pervade this room. She had driven his ancestor from the Manor. She was promising him happiness now.

He turned out the last light and went up the dark oak staircase to his room.

CHAPTER XXII

THE SQUIRE'S BIRTHDAY

It was the most perfect of September days

Peter and Marion, with true care for the garden, had arranged that the tents for the refreshments should be set up in a big level meadow behind the house, and not on the lawns, so that, although the Manor grounds were open to all the Squire's guests, they tended to stay down in the meadow near the food, where the various excitements of the day's programme would also take place.

There was a cricket match between Trewint and Clowance villages. There were sports for the younger elements of the assembly, and bowls for the older. There was to be dancing in the evening. And all the afternoon a brass band—the Coldstream Guards Band, all the way from London!—filled the air with tunes which were known to them all, from a programme carefully selected by Bill Lanteglos for that special audience.

It was a great day!

But perhaps the real event of the whole party was the solemn stone-laying for the new hospital.

After the final consent had been obtained from Clowance for the donation of the land for the site, Peter had moved heaven and earth to get the foundations excavated and the first stones in place so that the ceremony could take place on that afternoon. He had worked hard in argument and persuasion on his committee of parsons, and had finally got agreement from all the four. They would each lay a stone of the new hospital and

pledge themselves to work for it when it was completed, without consideration of creed or belief.

It was a great victory.

The simple little service which had been arranged around the ceremony was necessarily of a religious character. The Cornish folk are a religious people. Since John Wesley swept the county from indifference into fervour, no part of England can have seen religion take so living a part in its everyday life. It would have seemed a most improper proceeding to the inhabitants of Peter's three villages that the stones of their hospital should not be laid to the accompaniment of hymns nor dedicated to God in prayer.

Much heart-searching had to go to the preparation of that service. It was essential that all should be able to take a part in it, and none offended, that each of the four clergymen should officiate in some way, and yet give no cause for jealousy to the others. Peter had consulted the wise old Canon about his problem, feeling it best to appear to have arranged the whole ceremony himself rather than risk the dangers of a discussion by his committee, which was with so much difficulty held together.

"You can see the pitfalls which lie in the way of any attempt at Church Union," smiled the old man. Peter had gone to see him one evening shortly before the great day. "To my mind, although it is a beautiful idea, it cannot be more than an idea, a dream of what one would wish, no more."

"It seems very absurd to the layman, sir." Peter had a frown of annoyance on his face.

"Not so absurd, after all," replied the Canon, shaking his head, "if one looks at it from the point of view of people brought up with definite ideas. You're approaching the whole problem from a different angle. You're just a Christian, not a Churchman—nor a member of a chapel!" He smiled. "You must realise that there is a long history behind that division, a long history of misunderstandings and, it must be admitted, oppressions.

Human intelligence has advanced, toleration has become a possibility with the growth of real civilisation. But there are a lot of people in these country districts who still feel it impossible to be really tolerant. Everything is a matter of point of view. To you it is all so simple that you frown with annoyance at what you consider as the narrow-minded attitude of your fellow-men. Oh, yes! I saw the frown just now! But all these things mean a lot to them. They have fought for the freedom to think as they wished, as they *must*, if they were to be honest. That is what has made the gulf between them so deep. And it is difficult for a Nonconformist to realise that a Churchman, if he is honestly a Churchman, *cannot* admit that the ministry of the Methodist parson is of the same standing as his own. He *cannot*, if he is to remain a Churchman. That does not mean that he despises the Methodist. It simply means that he, the Churchman, by the very rules—if one may so call them—of his belief, can only admit that those who have followed those rules are real priests, competent to perform certain rites. It is ridiculous to expect him to think otherwise."

"You're doing what the French call '*enfoncer une porte ouverte*,' breaking in an open door, Canon," said Peter with a smile. "I agree utterly with you, and I'm afraid my frowns are for the Nonconformist who cannot understand that point of view."

"And there you're wrong. It *is*, for him, an insult, in a way, that his ministry is not accepted by Churchmen. He accepts the ministry of the Church as equal to his own. I can see his point of view and sympathise with it. But then I am an old man, and so broad a Churchman that I fear my colleague Nanslowe would be tempted to report me to my bishop if he didn't know that the bishop and I are old friends and frequently have long arguments over this very point and others like it. My attitude, Sir Peter, is, and very long has been, that we must all worship our Maker in the way that our own hearts dictate to us. We must be content to decide these things *for*

ourselves, and not attempt to judge others 'Judge not that ye be not judged.' That is a very sane and necessary admonition, to my mind. It is always well to remember that the human intellect is very fallible, very weak and limited. Unless you are prepared to admit, as my friend Père Anton admits, the doctrine of Papal Infallibility, it seems to me to be impossible for any one of us to say that any other of us is definitely wrong in his opinions, or that we ourselves are right. Personally, I would never take that responsibility. The doctrine I preach to those who come to Clowance Church could be accepted by almost any Christian. But we are wandering from our point I know you are a busy man. Let us get back to the discussion of our little ceremony of dedication of this hospital. And let us make it as simple as we can."

And simple it was.

Canon Holman, as the oldest of the four clergymen, universally beloved and respected throughout the district, took the leading part in the little service. He it was who gave the short but very moving address which called upon the whole neighbourhood to work together in helping to make the hospital a success. But Mr. Vivian led the gathered people in prayer, Mr. Mitchell read a lesson from the Gospels, telling of Christ's mission of healing, and Mr. Nanslowe pronounced one or two appropriate collects selected by the old Canon, and the final prayer of Saint Chrysostom and that beautiful quotation from Corinthians with which so many services to the worship of God are ended, be they in church or chapel :

"The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with us all evermore."

As the peaceful words floated across the afternoon calm in "Father" Nanslowe's musical voice, there was complete silence in the park, or, as it seemed, in the whole world. Everyone had come to assist at the stone-laying, and everyone in this case meant the whole population of the region. The utter quiet was not the least impressive

moment of that afternoon, and it seemed to be minutes before Canon Holman gave the signal for breaking up the gathering by turning to speak to Peter.

"I doubt whether even you yourself realise what a great thing you are doing for this district, Sir Peter," he said earnestly, "not merely in the gift of this hospital, but also in the way in which you have brought these people together and given them a common interest to keep them together in the future. It is no small achievement, believe an old man who has worked in the same direction with terribly modest results to show for the years he has spent on it."

Peter made an embarrassed gesture.

"I had the good fortune to have a kindly old uncle who was rich, sir," he said with a laugh, "and you had already prepared the ground!"

"Well, well, I won't bother you further. I know you won't want to hear my pretty speeches!" The Canon smiled understandingly. "You'll want to get away to your guests, I know!"

"I've promised to start the bowling competition, I'll admit," said Peter with relief.

"Then off you go!"

He watched Peter's tall muscular figure striding across the grass until it was out of sight, his lips still curved in a smile. Then with a sigh he turned away to find Mr. Vivian at his elbow.

"Ah, Vivian! That young man has helped us all a step nearer to Christ's Kingdom on earth to-day," he said, taking the other's outstretched hand.

"Amen to that, Canon!" Mr. Vivian's eyes followed the direction in which the other man had been looking. "I was just going to say the same thing. This ideal of Church Union which must be before all our minds begins to seem more of a possibility after this afternoon, doesn't it?"

The older man shook his head slowly.

"You'll think me paradoxical, but I'm very much in

earnest when I say that I think that on the whole we shall be nearer together the less we try to think in that direction. Oh, don't misunderstand me." He put a thin hand on the other's shoulder for a moment. "I would be a happy man, indeed, if I thought that such a thing were possible, and that all men who call themselves Christians might really unite in their worship. But I am afraid that it is my bitter experience that all our efforts in that direction tend only to underline, to bring into prominence the many differences that exist between us all. You don't know my friend, Père Anton, the Jesuit priest at the convalescent home over the hill. I tell you, Vivian, I respect that man and his very real faith. The Church of Rome is nearer to the Church of England than the Church of England to the Protestant Nonconformist Churches, I dare say you would say. Yet I would no more suggest that he should ask me to preach in his chapel than I would ask a Buddhist priest to do so. Nor would I expect him to permit me to do so. I feel very strongly that our aim must not be to expect 'concessions' in these matters. We each have our own ways of thinking. Let us concentrate on realising what we have in common, in respecting each other's points of view, and in living in peace together. These endeavours to wipe out the divergences between the various forms of Christ's Church cannot but lead, as I say, to showing up the differences. But there *are* things which we have in common. Let us think about those. Let us work in unison when we can. Let us respect the differences that exist. We can all help the poor, we can all tend the sick, we can all lead the best lives we know how, according to our own lights. We can unite in the knowledge that we all serve the same Master. Our ways may be different, but that, to my mind, is a little matter if we will only let it be so. Our Lord was not so strict in these matters. 'He that is not against us is for us.' I always think of that when I hear of the bickering which poisons so much of the life of our generation of Christians."

The Wesleyan had listened intently, his eyes never leaving the other's face.

"Canon Holman, I shall preach a sermon on that text," he said earnestly.

"Well, there are few better," smiled the old man. "I think I shall do so myself. It always does us good from time to time to remember that the great thing, after all, is simply to be on the Lord's side." He looked around him with astonishment. "Why, we're all alone," he said, "I've kept you so long with my theories that the others are all off somewhere. And I've to play in the bowling competition. How about you?"

The other laughed.

"I too, though I shall make a very poor show."

"Then we'll go together."

In the big meadow the party was in full swing. The band was playing merrily again. The shrill sounds of children's voices could be heard even above that gay music, and an occasional shout from the bowlers as a very good point was marked. The cricketers were farther away, but from time to time vigorous clapping announced some bowler's or batsman's triumph.

Peter, after setting the first wood rolling on the bowling green, spent his time passing from group to group, with a word for the children, a little chat with the old ladies, a gossip with the farmers, very much, as he told Marion when she congratulated him on his evident popularity, "all things to all men." He worked hard.

But the thought of Clowance never left him.

It had so long been his hope that on this day he would be able to announce to all these dear people that, although he was a new squire, he was to give them their old love back again, by making Clowance Zabuloe his lady. He had seen in his imagination the glad faces all around them, and heard the cheers with which the news would be greeted. Clowance would be beside him, her warm pallor glowing with a generous flush as she answered them.

And here he was alone. Clowance had not even come to wish him joy, even if she could not give it to him by sharing with him all this loyalty and affection which belonged to her as well as to him.

"Miss Clowance ed'n 'ere!"

Peter looked round him sharply. The voice had come from beyond a thick clump of bushes behind him, where he stood watching the cricket match. He had been standing there for some minutes and had heard no one, but the grass was thick and would mask the noise of footsteps. He waited a second or two to hear if there were any answer to that queer hoarse whisper:

"Miss Clowance ed'n 'ere!"

The words were repeated, but there seemed no one to say them nor yet to answer. He took a step or two backwards, where the bushes grew lower, and peered through the thinning branches at the top.

Bart Nancecullom was sitting on the grass in the shade, his face glum, and beside him was kneeling the odd figure of Zacky.

"Ded 'ee 'ear me, maaaster?"

"I heard you, Zacky. You've looked everywhere?"

"Ess. Searched up an' daown, I 'ev. Ed'n 'ere."

Bart sighed.

"Thank God!"

"Es that all, maaaster?"

"That's all, Zacky. You run off and amuse yourself now, but mind you come and tell me if she should come later. Be on the look out!"

"Zacky will!"

The loose-limbed creature ran off clumsily, and Bart's head went down between his hands again.

Here was someone who wasn't enjoying the Squire's party! Peter hesitated a moment. Should he speak to the young farmer? It would acknowledge that he had been there to listen to that strange little conversation. He shrugged his shoulders and walked off in another direction, but he could not help wondering why Bart

Nanceculom should thank God that Clowance Zabuloe should not be there.

A year ago it would have been a new excuse for bitterness. He remembered how he had complained to Bill Lanteglos that life always managed to take away with one hand what it had given with the other. Here was another typical example. He had fortune, a house to dream about, the home of his family, and yet the one thing he needed, the love of that girl, was denied to him. He smiled to himself, a little sadly perhaps, but that was all. These last months had, indeed, changed him. Marion and Bill, the old Canon, and most of all these kindly folk, had altered his outlook on the world, and he was more inclined now to see a punishment for his own selfishness in Clowance's attitude towards him, than a special spite of fate. And once again the idea of giving Zabuloe back to her, without conditions, flashed through his mind.

"Well, Mister Bart, you've found a nice cool plaace!"

Bart looked up in surprise to see Adam and Zillah Richards and a crony of theirs, a Mrs. Pearce, standing beside him.

"Yes," he agreed, "cool and secluded."

The hint was not taken.

"We've bin lookin' raound the park. 'T'es fine an' graand the Squire 'ave arranged et all!"

"Praper 'andsome, 't'es indeed!" agreed Mrs. Pearce.

"Ded you 'ave a look raound, Mister Bart?"

"No, Adam. I've just come up the drive from Tre-wint and round the house from the terrace to this field. It looked very well to me, but it was too hot for me to be tempted to walk much."

"You should, though," urged Adam warmly. "Praper 'andsome. Zillah's right about that, and Mrs. Davey ded taake us raound the 'ouse, too. 'T'es just like the old days, only better. Ef Miss Clowance would only jest taake a look, she'd be daggin' to be back, an' the Squire wouldn't look so glum."

"Don't talk sech nonsense, Adam," snapped his wife. Adam grinned.

"I d'know what I be talking 'baout ! " he said, " an' it's a happy man I'd be ef she was to taake the Squire "

"Well, she's not likely to," announced Mrs. Pearce with decision " My Ada, her that's to Nancarrow's, she tells me young Mister Walter's jest silly about Miss Clowance. She's often over to Trevisa, that's Major Trewint's plaace, an' jest next door to Nancarrow's, so Ada d'see a lot of it, with young Mister Fred Nancarrow being sech a friend of Mister Walter Trewint, an' all. Most suitable, too Mister Walter's the second son, of course, but it's jest right, him goin' back to the old family house, an' all "

"But Miss Clowance's more a Zabuloe than a Trewint, Mrs. Pearce," objected Adam, almost angrily. "'Tis more suitable fur her to go back to Zabuloe, along o' the Squire."

"Well, you won't see *that* happen," insisted that good lady. "Mark my words! My Ada's zeen the Squire an' Mister Walter with your Miss Clowance, an' there's no doubt where *she'll* look fur a husband "

"You let Miss Clowance speak fur 'erself," suggested Zillah shrewdly. "An' your young Mister Walter Trewint ed'n my fancy, anyway."

Bart's mouth curved in a mocking smile. It was a pity the Squire had moved away so soon! It would have done him good to hear that conversation. He had seen the dark head just now between the leaves at the top of the bushes, and had wondered what he would have made of his own words with Zacky. These last wise remarks would have been interesting hearing for Sir Peter Zabuloe.

"There now! That'll be supper!"

A great cheer rang out over the warm evening air.

"Aye! That'll be the end of that cricket match! Come, Zillah! Mrs. Davey ded say as zupper would be graand."

"Will you be comin' along, Mister Bart?" asked Mrs. Pearce politely.

"Presently."

The good woman raised her eyebrows at the barely civil answer and hurried on to join Zillah and Adam Richards. There were those, she remembered, who thought that that young man had raised his eyes to Miss Clowance. Poor chance he'd have, with Mister Walter Trewint in the field, but there was no harm in hoping! She smiled as she drew level with Zillah.

"Too good fur the likes o' we, Mister Bart," she suggested meaningly.

"Him?" Zillah sniffed. "Poor lad! Lovesick, that's all as is the matter with Mister Bart."

Peter watched his guests file into the great tents. They were a happy-looking crowd of people! It was a great joy to see them all, so good-tempered and pleasant! It was a good world after all! The long tables were loaded with good things, and he could see Davey, busy with his little following of imported waiters, important and anxious, and Marion, cool and efficient, ready with a word or a glance to see to it that everyone was served.

"Plaze, zur!"

He turned quickly. The little maidservant who helped Mrs. Davey in the kitchen, and who was attending to the door of the house while the others were busy in the tents, stood beside him, flushed and breathless with running.

"Yes, Ellen. What is it?"

"Plaze, zur, 'tes Miss Clowance Zabuloe and Lawyer Sleeman has come."

Clowance? Peter's heart missed a beat, and the blood rushed hotly to his face.

"You should have brought them out here, Ellen," he began, but the girl broke in eagerly.

"I ded aask 'em to come aout, zur, but they wouldn't come, zur. I ded'n know what to do, so jest set 'em in the 'all, zur, an' come right aout to tell you!"

"Very well, Ellen. Go back quickly and tell them that I shall be with them in a minute."

The girl ran off eagerly, and Peter, his mind in a whirl of conjectures, went over to Marion.

"Marion, I've got to go up to the house. Ellen has just come out to tell me that Miss Clowance Zabuloe and Mr. Sleeman the lawyer have come. They wouldn't come out, she says."

Marion looked at him quickly.

"All right, Peter," she said. She knew what he must be feeling, and forbore to ask foolish questions to which he could not know the answer. "I'll see that things go all right. You'll have to be fairly quick, you know, for I'm told that there's to be a speech, and you'll have to reply."

"I'll be as quick as I can. I'll"—he hesitated for a moment, and then smiled shyly into her kindly eyes. "I hope I'll be able to persuade them to come out here, too."

"Do," she answered, putting her hand on his arm for a second. "And good luck, Peter!"

With a glance of gratitude he turned away.

Clowance! Here! And to-day! She'd refused to come on account of her business engagement. The lawyer too. What did it all mean? Was she . . .? Could she . . .? He refused to allow even his thoughts to finish those sentences, but hurried on.

At the corner of the house he almost ran into Simon Keast. The fat man was dripping with perspiration, his eyes were almost popping out of his head, his hands were wringing together in a favourite gesture of his when he was disturbed.

"Sir Peter, Sir Peter!" he cried, in his thin voice, now thinner and more squeaky with emotion. "I wouldn't have had this happen for worlds! I tried to stop it, and when I couldn't stop it altogether, I tried to get it put off until another day! It was no good! They wouldn't listen to me! And then I tried to get you on the telephone, but it was too late. All I could do was

to try to get here before them, to warn you, but I was too late even with that! I can't tell you how much I regret this! You must believe me that I knew nothing about it until two days ago! Nothing at all!"

Peter, bewildered in the midst of this rushing river of words, stood still and let the lawyer finish. His heart was pounding in his breast. Whatever this meant, it spelt some kind of disaster. There was no mistaking the inference of all this spate of words, Keast's tragic tone and long face.

At the first moment of hesitation he interrupted.

"What is it, Keast? You're not very lucid, you know!" He smiled a little wanly. "What is it you're trying to tell me?"

The fat man collapsed suddenly like the traditional pricked balloon.

"Sleeman," he said, completely at a loss for words. "He's here."

"Yes I know" Peter put his hand on the other man's arm. "I think I'd better go in to see them, don't you?" he suggested kindly. "They'll tell me about it, won't they?"

Keast nodded, gulping helplessly.

"Come, then. They're in the hall, waiting for us"

And Peter went in to meet Clowance, now for the first time in the home of their ancestors.

CHAPTER XXIII

CLOWANCE AT THE MANOR

THE windows of the great hall were small, and even after the soft sunlight of the evening it seemed very dark as he went in. At first he saw only Clowance. She stood with her hands behind her back, staring up at the wide staircase, on the walls of which hung the old portraits of the Zabuloes.

Against the rich oak panelling she made the loveliest picture. Her hat and shoes were white, her dress a curious tone of blue which matched her eyes.

Peter went forward with outstretched hands, forgetting for a moment the fear which had come into his heart as he had spoken to Keast on the terrace, remembering only that Clowance was at last in his house, in *their* house.

“Clowance!”

She turned sharply.

“How wonderful that you could come after all! I had really been terribly disappointed that you would not be here to-day. Thank you for being here!”

He was smiling, but the smile died as he finished speaking. The girl's face was twisted in what was a positive grimace, and she laughed, a hard, sharp little laugh as she turned to glance rapidly at a corner of the hall where her lawyer, old Mr. Sleeman, sat hugging his portfolio grimly to him.

“Thanks!” she laughed again. “No! I don't think you should exactly thank me for coming, Sir Peter. Mr. Sleeman and I have come here strictly on business.

Otherwise I should certainly not be here I'd already sent you my refusal of your invitation to your party. I'm not here as a guest."

Peter raised his eyebrows.

"I see," he said slowly, "then, in that case, I think it might perhaps have been more considerate of you to have chosen another day for your visit. As you must imagine, I'm very busy to-day I have all my guests to think of, and I've left them at a most inconvenient moment"

"Naturally!" There was a queer catch in the girl's voice. "I understand. But it really is most urgent for me to transact this business to-day. I hadn't expected to be able to come to see you about it for another fortnight, but"—she looked towards the old lawyer as if asking his help, but the old man sat silent, and she went on lamely, "things turned out differently, so I came at once. I want to get it settled directly. Could we go somewhere where we could talk in peace?"

Peter did not answer immediately. He stood there looking at Clowance with a steady cold stare which was making the girl very uncomfortable. She turned away, as if in the hope of escaping that cold look, but seemed forced to meet his eyes again.

"Could we go into your study or the library?"

Peter turned towards Simon Keast, who had been standing modestly behind him, watching the scene with his prominent eyes almost falling out of his hot and shiny face.

"Don't you think you could transact this business with Keast? He's in charge of my affairs as far as they touch Zabuloe. Then I could go back to my guests. I'm told that old Benny Cowling is meditating a speech." His smile was so charming that Sleeman, sitting back in the shadows, felt a wave of sympathy flow over him, quickly followed by a wave of discomfort at the thought of the task in front of him on this September evening, "and he'll be tremendously nervous, poor old fellow."

Clowance made a gesture of impatience.

"I'm afraid not," she said curtly. "This business must be conducted with you yourself, though you may wish Mr. Keast to be with us. It's important."

Peter shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well," he said, with resignation. "Will you come into the library? Mr. Sleeman, Keast, perhaps you will follow us?"

He led the way across the hall and into the imposing room. The evening sun was streaming in at the windows at one side and lighting up the rich bindings of the rows of books which filled the shelves from floor to ceiling. Out of the corner of his eyes, without appearing to watch her, he noticed with a keen joy the impression which the room was producing on the girl. She had flushed with evident excitement as she had come in, and there was a glow about her expression which satisfied him.

He motioned the others to take their places at a heavy oak refectory table which stood along one of the walls and which he had taken the habit of using as a desk. He smiled to himself as he saw how they divided naturally into two camps, taking the two sides of the narrow table, Sleeman beside Clowance, Keast close beside himself.

"Here we shall be quiet and undisturbed," he said, looking from the girl to the old lawyer at her side. "Perhaps you would be so good as to tell me what this is all about, so that I may be able to get back to my duties as host as quickly as possible."

Clowance looked quickly at her lawyer.

"Mr. Sleeman," she said, a little breathlessly, "will you explain?"

The old lawyer gave her a glance in which Peter thought he could read reproach. He hesitated for a second or two, searching among his neat papers which he drew from his portfolio with an evident reluctance.

He gave the usual little professional cough.

"You may remember, Sir Peter," he began in an almost apologetic tone, "that when you came to my offices to discuss the purchase of Zabuloe Manor I went into some detail in explaining to you the rather unusual terms of the will of the late owner, old Lady Zabuloe, Miss Clowance's grandmother?"

Peter felt a cold shiver creep up his spine and over his scalp. He remembered the terms of that will, the conditions on which he had bought the property. He recalled his interview with the lawyer about that piece of land for the hospital, and the very special smile with which the old man had greeted his objection that the right to repurchase the Manor was only very theoretical.

The right to repurchase the Manor!

"There was a clause, you may remember," the old thin voice was droning on, a little hesitant still, clearly unhappy at what he was having to say, with a hint of an apology in the polite tones, "by which it was stipulated that, in the event of Miss Clowance being able to find the necessary sums within ten years of the purchase to buy back the Manor at the price at which it had been sold, and to pay back the sums expended by the purchaser on the house and grounds, she should have the right to require that the property be sold back to her. This was clearly explained to you at the time, was it not?"

Anxious eyes sought his face.

He nodded.

"Certainly," he agreed, "I perfectly understood that I was buying under that express condition"

The old man sighed.

"Then, that being so, Sir Peter, you will be prepared for the announcement that my client intends to exercise that right and buy back Zabuloe Manor."

The announcement, stated so baldly, expected though it had been since the moment when he had met Clowance's hard answer to his greeting in the hall, seemed to hit

him like a blow between the eyes. But he let no hint of his feelings reach his face. He turned to the girl, his expression one of polite interest, no more

"Indeed?" he said quietly. "You had told me, I remember, on the day when I decided to buy it, that you had hoped to buy back the estate, but I had not imagined at that time that it was more than a rather remote wish. May I ask when you expect me to leave the Manor?"

"I've come here to give you the minimum six months' notice which the will stipulates," she answered. "That was why I had to insist on seeing you yourself and settling this business to-day. I didn't want to waste a single hour!"

There was a note of defiance, of almost hysterical excitement in the girl's voice. It reminded him of that morning, now almost a year ago, when he had told her, out on the terrace by the fountain, that he was going to buy her home. Not since that day had he heard just that tone. He had learned to love the soft round notes that he had come to associate with Clowance, and he winced a little at the painful impression he was now receiving

And he had been mad enough to think of *giving* his beloved Manor to this girl!

"I quite understand," he heard himself saying, very calmly. "I do not wish to insinuate that Miss Zabuloe has not the necessary sums in hand," he addressed himself to the lawyer, ignoring the girl entirely, "but I feel I must warn you that I have spent rather a lot of money here on the house. I had intended to make it my permanent home, you will understand. I was planning to retire from the Bar before long, and to settle down here definitely, so that it was worth my while to make the place really comfortable. And it needed a great deal of attention!" He smiled and made a light gesture with his hand. "It was in an absolutely unbelievable condition when I took it over. Now it is a

gentleman's house. But all this has naturally meant a very considerable outlay."

"You need not be afraid! I've plenty of money!"

Again the harsh tones shocked him.

"I shall naturally provide you with all the accounts of my transactions. It will take me a little time as I shall have to get into touch with my friends who carried out the detail of the work for me, and in whose hands I left the financial side of the question to a great extent." He still ignored the girl and addressed himself exclusively to Sleeman, "But there will be no difficulty about it. Six months will give me plenty of time."

"Mr. Sleeman," Clowance took the first pause in the conversation as an opportunity for breaking in, "will you please explain to Sir Peter that the funds at my disposal will be ample to settle all his bills without haggling over details?"

The old lawyer's glance was eloquent of apology this time.

"Miss Zabuloe has had the most unusual good fortune," he explained gently in his unsteady old voice, "she has discovered by a very strange chance that three fields which she had considered as almost worthless grazing ground contain a very valuable lode of tin. There is now no doubt at all that there is a fortune in those fields. We have had them examined by the most eminent authorities, and we have been in negotiations with people interested in mining. The whole matter is to be taken up in the very near future, and Trewint mine is likely to rival Dolcoath, to say the very least of it."

Peter pursed his lips

"And this district be spoiled?" he said grimly.

"No!"

It was Clowance who intervened.

"Indeed?"

"No!" she insisted. "The fields are over the hill. It will be easy to hide the whole mine from sight. It shan't be allowed to spoil Zabuloe."

Peter shrugged his shoulders.

"A mining district!" he remarked doubtfully, "but it cannot interest me very much, except sentimentally, since I shall have left the district in six months and shall certainly not come back to look at the mine!"

"There is now one point," interposed the lawyer, perhaps with the idea of changing a subject which promised to bring an uncomfortable discussion in its train, "and that is the question of the method of payment. It would be of immense convenience to Miss Zabuloe if you could see your way to accept payment for the estate, etc., in shares in this new mine. The company is in the process of being formed. There is no doubt about the value of the property. It is not a gamble that is being offered to you. It is an advantage to you, in fact. The shares would be transferred to you at par, of course, and there is no doubt at all that within a very short time they would materially have increased in value. But you will understand that at the beginning of the enterprise Miss Zabuloe would not so easily dispose of so large a sum in actual *cash* without . . ."

He hesitated, and Peter, smiling a little bitterly, chose the moment to interpose a question.

"Is there any real reason why I should consider Miss Zabuloe's convenience in this matter?" he asked gently.

The girl flushed angrily.

"No!" she answered roughly. "And I want no consideration. I must ask you to arrange that *money*, and not shares, are available at the right time to pay Sir Peter for everything. I should greatly prefer that he should have nothing to do with the mine."

"Then we are in entire agreement," smiled Peter. "I shall not be at all particular about the exact date of payment, Mr Sleeman," he went on, turning to the lawyer, "it will not matter to a week or two, or even a month or two, when the money is forthcoming"

"I think you would be well advised to take the shares, Sir Peter," insisted Sleeman anxiously. "It is very

hard that you should have to leave this house so soon after spending so much thought and care on it. I feel that my client would be happier to know that you were not altogether a loser in the matter, after all."

His eyes sought the girl's, and Peter saw the sulky expression break for a moment to give place to a smile that was almost guilty, but a second later she was looking straight into his own face.

"You can do as you like about it," she said, and her voice was quieter and softer than it had been, "but you must go at the end of the six months. You didn't hesitate to turn *me* out, after all, and I don't really see why I should consider you so ill-used when I turn you out!"

Peter raised his eyebrows with a comical little expression.

"I am not complaining," he said, with a light laugh—she was so like a naughty child, after all—"but I think that the situations are not really identical, after all, you know."

"Not identical?"

"No," Peter explained very patiently, as he would to the child he considered her at the moment. "You were only a stranger to me, and a stranger who had treated me with very scant politeness!" He smiled to himself in reminiscence of that scene on the terrace. "You and I have been very good"—he hesitated as he searched for a word—"acquaintances, and I was hoping that we were very near to becoming friends—at least."

His eyes sought hers. They seemed to have forgotten that there was anyone but themselves in the room. The two lawyers watched them as if they might have been at the play.

"Friends?" Clowance was not at her ease. The hot colour had not left her face. "I never accepted you as a friend. I've always told you I should get back

the Manor as soon as ever I could. I'm thankful my opportunity has come so soon."

"Very well." Peter pushed back his chair from the table. "The details can be settled later between our lawyers. For the moment I suppose it's enough that I acknowledge that I've had 'notice to quit' in six months!"

"Yes."

There was an unhappy silence. All were standing round the table awkwardly except Peter. He alone seemed to be utterly at his ease.

"Would you care to see round the house?" he asked casually. "It will give you an idea of what you will be paying for, for I'm afraid that the bills I shall have to send to you may appear rather alarming."

"I thought you had guests," remarked Clowance, with a touch of malice.

"I have," agreed Peter, with a charming smile, "but I should have to ask you to excuse me as a guide. You must know your way around this house, as I did not when you were so good as to send your servant to show it to me!" He turned to the two lawyers. "It is a great pity! The house will now have to pass out of the direct line. It might perhaps be a good idea to make it into a museum. Trewint mine will make this into a populous district. There might still be people who'd care to see how the old families of Cornwall used to live."

"But—I'm a Zabuloe!" protested Clowance hotly, breaking in indignantly on Peter's cool phrases.

"Certainly you are," he admitted blandly, "but when you marry . . ."

"I shan't marry," she interrupted quickly.

He raised his eyebrows again.

"Then—a little later, I admit, but so small a thing, when looked at from the point of view of the generations behind us—when you die, the line will die out, the name will disappear. No more Zabuloes at Zabuloe Manor! What a pity!"

She turned away abruptly. She had no answer for him

"Then—you don't wish to go over the house?"

"No, thank you."

"You, perhaps, Mr. Sleeman? Keast knows it. He would show it to you, I'm sure."

He could see the old lawyer's eyes seek the girl's, but she made no sign and, with obvious reluctance, he declined.

Without another word they started back into the hall, making their way slowly towards the great iron-studded front door. Clowance's eyes wandered avidly over the panelled walls with their rows of portraits, the noble staircase, the fire-place, with its coat of arms and its proud motto.

"You told me once that the portrait of Clowance Zabuloe was in the long drawing-room. I should like to go and look at her again." Her colour was high and her eyes bright with excitement. "I've something to say to her!"

Peter met the brilliant glance gravely.

"You know the way," was all he said.

The girl caught her breath in admiration as she stood in the doorway of that beautiful room, so cool and dignified with its green walls and rosewood and mahogany furniture. The man beside her glowed at that involuntary admission of his success. They stood in silence side by side for a moment or two, and then Clowance went forward to the fire-place and stood facing that other Clowance Zabuloe whose portrait so dominated the whole room.

"It must be hard to leave all this!" breathed the old lawyer, almost under his breath.

Peter caught the words and smiled gently

"Yes," he said, "but I shall have had a very wonderful year, and it will be a time full of memories which I shall treasure. I don't regret it."

Clowance turned back to him.

"I've been telling her," she said defiantly, "that I've completed her work. She drove away one Peter Zabuloe. I'm sending away his descendant. The Manor belongs to *us*, to her and to me!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE END OF THE DAY

AFTER seeing his visitors out of the great front door, across the terrace, and into the lawyer's big luxurious car, Peter hurried back through the house and out to the long tents where talk and laughter reigned and all was gay and care-free. Even across the momentous conversation which he had just been having, he had heard murmurs from that other world outside, and now he must go back to it.

He did not see the awkward form of Zacky slip from behind a bush under the windows of the library. His thoughts were too fully engaged. Zacky shambled across the lawns and down to the hiding-place in which he felt certain he would still find Bart.

"Mis Clowance 've been 'ere!" he announced with pride when he was once more standing before the young farmer.

"What's that? What did you say?"

"Miss Clowance 've been 'ere," he repeated with a mysterious grin. "She've gorne naow. She an' lawyer Sleeman. In a gurt car."

"Why didn't you tell me?" asked Bart angrily.

"Could'n," was the eager reply. "She ded'n come aout. She went into the 'aouse. Zacky listen. Zacky stan' under the winder. He hear all they zaay."

"Well, and what *did* they say?"

"Squire got to leave Zabuloe." The poor witless creature's voice was mournful. He had taken a great liking for the Squire during old Benny Cowling's illness, and all Bart's talk about his jealousy for Peter had not

really penetrated into his consciousness in a way to mean anything more than the words he had said. He did not realise that he was bringing good news to Bart. "Six months, she zed. Squire goin' away!"

Bart's face lit up.

"She said so? She's pleased, Zacky?"

"She tell 'en t'git away in six months!"

Zacky had no refinements in his powers of observation.

Bart sprang to his feet.

"Come! We'll go and get some of this fine Squire's supper now. Come, Zacky!"

And together they made their way into the tent where they could hear Peter's voice just finishing his speech. It was a surprise to Bart that there should be no sign of anger or depression on the face of the man he so hated. There was only the genial kindness with which all the villagers had come to associate their Squire. He was making a good joke at the moment of their entry, and they passed unobserved in the midst of the general laughter.

"Caan't bate Squire!" remarked Tom Pearce, husband of the Mrs. Pearce who had rejoiced Bart's heart with her opinions of Peter's chances, earlier in the afternoon. "Good food, good music, good cider, an' a grand story! Never was such a Squire in Zabuloe, that I'll warrant!"

"Well, better make the most of him while he's here!" was Bart's sour comment.

"While 'e's 'ere? W'at's that?" Tom Pearce shrugged his shoulders. "Put your nose aout o' joint, Maaster Bart, 'ev'n't 'ee? Well! Ate up yer zupper. You'll feel better aafter a glaass o' that prime cider, too!"

He slouched off to talk to a friend, and Bart helped himself to the good things which still remained on the tables in spite of the fact that supper was almost at an end and the band tuning up for the dancing.

Bart himself said little, only letting fall a hint here and there, but he had given no orders to Zacky to enjoin

silence, and, silent as the grave when he had been told to hold his tongue, Zacky was the most inveterate gossip when left to himself. There was nothing he loved more than to go from one to the other, giving the last little titbit of information, adding another little item to be passed on elsewhere. He was the news-sheet of the district for all local happenings. Bart felt certain that before the end of this day the news of the Squire's departure would be on everyone's lips without any help from himself.

More than one noticed the change in him. For weeks past, ever since his "accident," he had been moody and morose. His father constantly complained of the poor company he made. But this evening he was among the gayest. He danced on the grass with the best, and teased the girls merrily. A load was off his shoulders. Illogically he did not care that Mrs. Pearce should predict a marriage between Clowance and young Walter Trewint. So long as she did not marry Peter his heart was light.

As the rumour spread, the result of Zacky's vague remarks, half incomprehensible for the most part, but gradually taking a clearer shape in reply to questions, it was received at first with blank incredulity. Zacky was madder than usual. No one had seen Miss Clowance Zabuloe at the Manor. She'd not been there all day. Not even at the stone-laying, and she on the lady's committee, and all! How could this queer story be true? But as Zacky obstinately stuck to what he had said, and as further investigation had brought out that Clowance had indeed come for a short visit—Ellen had come out to the dance after supper, and had spread that part of the news herself—it had become more and more credible. It was discussed on all sides. The dancing was constantly breaking up into little groups as one or the other stopped a friend to ask if they had heard the news, and was it true, and what did they think of it?

Had Peter been able to hear the comments he would

have been deeply gratified. His friendliness and generosity, the staunch partisanship of all those who had been brought into particularly close touch with him, old Benny Cowling, his own servants, even Adam and Zillah Richards, had made of him a popular figure throughout his villages. He himself would have said, with a touch of his old cynicism, that it was easy enough to be popular with money at one's disposal, but he would have misjudged the basis of his own popularity. It was for his own qualities that he had come to be loved, the simplicity of his manner, the kindly interest he had shown in even the humblest, his way with the children.

"That Zacky'll 'ave maade a mistaake," grunted Adam when at long last the tale came to his ears. "Squire leaven' the Manor? Miss Clowance goin' back? An' haow would she be goin' back, will 'ee tell me that? she 'ar'n't no rich uncle to lave 'er no fortunes. W'ere'd she get all the money ter buy back the Manor, then?"

"Well, ef 'ee won't b'lave me, jest aask Zacky. 'E'll tell'ee. T'ed'n me as invented the taale."

"I'll do better," countered Adam grimly, "I'll get Zillah to aask Miss Clowance herself this very night. 'Ee c'n come raound to-morrow mornin' an' find aout for yerself ef yer story's true."

"And it'll be a bad daay fer us all ef so be as it is," was the comment. "'Av'n't noathin' 'gainst your Miss Clowance, but she's not the Squire. An' I don't hold with these haouses goin'n' aout o' the praper fam'lies, nurther. W'y dedn' she taake the Squire, naow? Tell me that! 'Twould 'ave been all right an' praper, that would." Adam's crony spat thoughtfully on the ground as he filled up his pipe. "Turnin' 'en aout like that! That's no waay to be'ave, that isn't!"

"Jest you waait an' see ef 'tes true before you go sayin' things 'gainst Miss Clowance," warned Adam, but his heart was heavy.

All the evening the story went to and fro. Peter knew nothing of it, strangely enough. His time was too fully

occupied for him even to think about his private tragedy, and even Marion, sensitive as she was to all things that affected Peter, only noticed that he seemed most busy and charming.

It was with an unusual fervour that the old refrain, "For he's a jolly good fellow," was sung by all his guests as they gathered together before departing. They put into that song a little of all they were feeling for him at the end of that long day, and it was all summed up in old Benny Cowling's words as he wrung Peter's hand, his old eyes filled with tears, when he came to say good-bye and thank their host for everyone.

"'Aven't never bin sech a parrrty, an' there 'aven't never bin sech a Squire," he said in his quavering old voice.

Peter made an excuse of his tiredness to send his two friends off to bed when the last of the guests had gone. Marion at last realised that perhaps all had not gone well in some way that she knew nothing of.

"That girl," she said to Bill, as they shut the door of their own room behind them, "if she's spoiled Peter's day with some foolishness, I don't know what I'd like to do with her!"

"Hold hard, old lady!" Bill grinned at his wife. "Don't you worry. Peter's pretty well able to look after himself, I should think."

She looked at him with an expression of pity.

"Poor old Bill! You're as blind as a bat! If she's turned him down definitely to-day, *everything's* spoiled for Peter. And I'm terribly afraid that she has."

It was just what Peter, as usual standing to take his night's leave of the portrait in the green drawing-room, was realising. When Clowance had refused him in the garden at Trewint, he had been depressed, but he had not been able to take his dismissal as final. He had always kept, hidden deep in his heart, the certainty that in the end he would win her for himself. He had never acknowledged it. He had pretended to himself that it was all

over, that he must make up his mind to live and die a bachelor, alone at Zabuloe, but something had remained to tell him that he must not lose hope. His nightly communion with that other Clowance Zabuloe, her promising smile of which he had spoken to Clowance that evening in the moonlight, told him that all would yet come out all right.

But now there was no more hope !

In six months he must leave this newly-found home, leave the villages, leave the chance meetings with Clowance in the lanes, their work together about the hospital, their common interest in all these dear people. He would go away, back to his lonely life in London, to his work, his career, his empty successes, which no one would now share. It was really the end, now.

He left the green drawing-room where he seemed no longer to see the promise in that sweet smile on the painted lips. In the dark hall he switched on the lights which illuminated the portraits of his ancestors while leaving the rest of the hall and staircase in shadow. He stood gazing at those dark frowning faces, with the deep blue eyes, thin lips and black curling hair. They had known, when they had gone to join their forbears in the quiet churchyard at Trewint or Clowance, that they were leaving behind them a part of themselves, their sons, to carry on the old name, to live in the old house, to beget sons in their turn. They had their immortality. He, when he left Zabuloe in six months' time, would leave it to know that it must die ; in that special identity as the home of the Zabuloes it would exist no more. As he had told Clowance, either she would marry, or, unmarried, she would die. In either case the Manor would pass into alien hands. Men with other names, other histories and traditions would come there. It would be Zabuloe Manor still in name, but in reality it would lose its life when he left it.

The end !

He would at least come back to Zabuloe at the last.

He would come back to his family in death, for he was decided that he must be buried in Clowance churchyard. Death! The end of all things! That was what he had said that day in the churchyard, talking to the old Canon, and Clowance had told him that she *knew* it was not the end! Was she right?

During all these last weeks he had subconsciously carried with him that thought. He had grown gradually into a nebulous form of belief in a form of Christianity which, he often told himself, would not pass muster with his friends the clergymen of his villages, but which had brought him a certain peace of mind, a certain support even in his disappointment at Clowance's refusal to marry him. It had seemed to assure him that all was yet well with the world. And he had been feeling his way towards that far greater assurance that this world was not the end of all things, *could* not be the end.

And now, with these thoughts about the end of his House, the end of the long line of Zabuloes, the urgent *need* to live on, here or in another world, seemed to have become a positive obsession. This *could* not be the end!

Smiling to himself, he put out the last lights and went up to his room. The Squire's room! Who would sleep there when he had gone?

Adam and Zillah took leave of their friends in the village and went silently home. They said no word to one another until they reached the door of Trewint House. Then Adam, gathering courage, put a hand on his wife's arm.

"Zillah," he said in a low voice, "you see that light in the parlour? Miss Clowance es still up."

"An' what then?" challenged she.

"I won't be able to slape this night ef so be I don't know the rights abaout that taale o' Zacky's," Adam muttered a little shamefacedly. "Ted'n a likely taale, but so long's I've heared et I can't get et aout o' my mind."

His wife smiled mockingly.

"An' so, plaze Zillah, well 'ee ask 'er ef 'tis true, eh? Ask her yerself, Adam Richards."

He shook his head, pursing his lips with decision.

"Naw. I dedn't never talk much to Miss Clowance. 'Tis always you d' spake to 'er. Naow, Zillah! You d'want t' know so much as me!"

Zillah looked doubtfully at the light streaming through the curtained window. Then she put out a firm hand and took the handle of the front door.

"Ess! I do," she said, and went into the house.

She walked over to the parlour door and knocked without a moment's hesitation.

"Is that you, Zillah?" Clowance's voice was soft and gracious now. "Come in! Come to tell me about the party, have you?"

"Ess. 'Twas a grand party. Wasn't never a graander aven in her old Ladyship's daay."

There was a note of challenge in Zillah's voice which Adam, standing just outside the door so that he might hear it all, noticed with a grin of satisfaction. There was no one like Zillah!

"I'm glad you had such a good time. We'll try to give them just as good a party next year!"

We, indeed! The colour drained from Adam's face. So it was true?

"We'll try?" repeated Zillah meaningly. "So 'tee true, then, w'at they was saayin' up at the Manor?"

"What were they saying?" asked the girl.

Surely Peter hadn't told them already? She had wanted to choose her own time and place, her own way of announcing the news.

"That you was goin' to turn aout the Squire from the Manor!"

Clowance looked up at the note of positive hostility that she had thought she had caught in her faithful servant's voice.

"Turn him out?" That *was* the expression on Zillah's face. "He turned me out first, you know!"

She smiled, but it was a very uncertain smile.

" 'Ted'n the saame thing. So 'tes true. An' I telled 'em 'tweren't true. I dedn't think et *could* be true. Well, so Squire's got to go, and that's the end o' the Zabuloes! Jest w'en we was hoapin' as it would be all right, aafter all! "

" All right! With me here, and a stranger at the Manor? " Clowance was indignant. " I shouldn't have thought that *you*, Zillah . . . "

She hesitated for a word, and the old servant broke in calmly

" You dedn't have t'staay daown 'ere. The Squire ded'n aask no better'n you should come back to the Manor! " she smiled broadly. " An' w'at's more, Miss Clowance, ef you was to be 'onest weth yerself fer oance, there ed'n noathin you d'want zo much yerself, ef you'd only let yer heart talk, an' not yer little petty bad temper. Jealous, that's w'at you be, Miss Clowance! An' all because the Squire's loved by every man, woman an' cheeld in the three villages! All because the Squire's maade Zabuloe into the haouse it used to be—only better! You jest marry your little Maaster Walter Trewint! He'll maake a fine Squire f'r Zabuloe, an' you jest zend away the finest young man as ever I ded zee! An' you've done et, naow! He'll not be aaskin' you agen', not aafter this aafternoon! " She tossed her head. " Well, don't you expect me an' Adam to go to the Manor with no Maaster Walter Trewint for our maaster, Miss Clowance, fer we won't be goin.' An' that's all. Good night to you, Miss Clowance. "

Clowance stared after the decided figure of her servant as it disappeared through the doorway. So *that* was how they were taking it, was it? That was what the villagers thought of her afternoon's work, over which she had been trying to feel triumphant?

All the doubt which had been hovering in the back of her head, all the hesitation which she had fought back and defeated by pushing forward her decision and rushing

her poor old friend, lawyer Sleeman, almost off his feet in his negotiations about that mine, all the hatred for herself for her action, which she had tried to mask under that horrible manner in her interview that afternoon, flooded back to overwhelm her.

What was she gaining ?

She'd be lonely in those great rooms, beautiful though he had made them. The gardens of the Manor, the wide terrace where she used to sit in the old days would be empty and desolate.

She had nothing left but her poor little triumph, that she had turned Peter away, that she had got back the Manor.

She gave a last glance round the comfortable " parlour," as Zillah always called it, put out the light and, with dragging footsteps, mounted the stairs. From the top she looked back and down into the hall. Here she had been happy. With a sigh she went on to her room and stood by the window.

Out in the garden a hunter's moon was riding in a clear sky, but a thin mist lay over the garden, close to the earth. On such a night the Zabuloe ghosts would walk, that other Clowance with that other Peter whom she had turned from his home !

She looked down at the cedar tree under which she had sat, she and Peter, and her eyes filled with tears of pity for herself till she could hardly see, and then she brushed them angrily aside and drew the curtains close, so that she should no longer see the moonlight.

CHAPTER XXV

THE ACCIDENT

"Tes Maaster Walter Trewint, Miss Clowance."

Clowance looked up to meet the expression of disapproval on Adam's face, and with difficulty kept back a smile. Dear loyal Adam!

"Will you show him in, please?"

She guessed well enough what Walter Trewint had come for. His father had hinted'd things to her when last she had been over at Trevisa, and she had not bothered to discourage him. She would pay for that to-day.

"Good morning, Walter!"

"Clowance! Is it true?"

She raised her eyebrows. It was a Zabuloe trick, though she did not realise it. Walter himself frowned as he thought how much she resembled her distant cousin. That look! It was just what he had seen on that fellow's face two nights ago!

"Is what true?"

"About the Manor! Have you bought it back?"

"I'm thinking of it," she admitted as casually as she could. "Nothing's settled yet. Sir Peter naturally recognises my right to do it, now that this mining scheme is going to make me so rich. I talked to him about it yesterday."

"But"—again a heavy frown clouded the young man's face, "I thought you'd definitely told him to get out! And about time he did, too! Upstart!"

Clowance smiled.

"Really, Walter! You ask him to Trevissa and you dine at Zabuloe as his guest!"

"I know, but it makes me mad to see him there!" He got up from the sofa where he had been sitting, and came over to the hearth where the girl was standing, looking down at him with gentle mockery. "Clowance! Will you marry me? Will you turn that chap out of the Manor and live there with me? We'd be so happy, so . . ."

She shook her head, still smiling softly.

"No, Walter, I won't. I've not finally decided to buy back the Manor after all, you see. I'm very comfortable here."

"But . . ."

"No, Walter! I won't marry you. I don't love you."

"But you . . ."

"No."

He met her eyes. There was so much decision in them, so much clear-sighted realisation of what he was, what he was thinking, so perfect a knowledge that it was her money and Zabuloe that he really wanted, that he flushed.

"I *do* love you, Clowance!" he blustered. "But I couldn't ask you before because I was too poor. All the money in our family has to go to Bob. You know that. And . . ."

"And your father had told you you must marry money." Again Clowance smiled. "I knew, Walter. I've known all along. But it wouldn't have made any difference if I'd loved you. But I don't, you see. So let's just leave it like that, shall we? We'll not talk of it again."

Walter glanced up at her face suspiciously.

"You're not marrying that chap, are you?" he asked with an almost threatening tone in his voice.

"No."

The reply was not too decided. He looked at her closely.

"H'm. Then don't! I—I don't think I could bear that." He took her limp hand in his. "It's one thing to lose you myself, but quite another to see that fellow get you. I won't bother you again, Clowance. Good morning!"

He was out of the room almost before she had realised that he was leaving. She first heard the front door and then the garden gate slam behind him.

She *had* thought of marrying Walter Trewint! She *had* played with the idea of him as squire at the Manor! That man in Peter's place! How could she ever have dreamed of it? It had all been a part of her childish scheme to humiliate the man she loved because, long months ago, he had bought her home! And he had humiliated her! Mentally she contrasted his bearing yesterday with her own behaviour on that long past day when he had first come to visit Zabuloe for the first time, and, even sitting there by herself, she blushed, ashamed, and to "give herself countenance," as she had heard Zillah put it, she went out to talk to her man about her chickens.

Walter Trewint flung himself on to his horse which he had left tethered outside Trewint House gate. A bad business. His father wouldn't be best pleased! He looked back at the house he had just left, frowning. Clowance had said she wasn't going to marry that fellow, but she hadn't sounded any too certain. And she'd denied that she'd sent the fellow away. Yet Mrs. Pearce had told her daughter that it was all settled! He'd got that from the girl that night. What was he to believe?

Finally he shrugged his shoulders and dug his spurs into his horse's flanks. The beast almost reared. She wasn't used to such treatment. Walter frowned even more deeply. His father had told him not to use spurs to that mare! Well, he'd remember in future! He dragged at the bit and had the animal in control again in a minute. And yet his father said he'd never make a horseman!

At that moment, round the corner of the lane came

Peter, riding a fine bay mare, a young creature, full of fire. He was on his way to see the Vicar of Trewint about some detail concerning the hospital, or he would never have chosen to ride through Trewint village. He had decided to avoid all risk of meeting Clowance during the rest of his stay in the Manor. But he had found no good excuse for refusing the Vicar's request, and there was no other road than past Trewint House.

Almost unconsciously he had slowed up as he passed the gate, and he looked towards the windows, standing open in the sunlight, with a vague idea that he might catch a glimpse of the girl without being noticed. The reins were lying loosely in his gloved hands, and all his attention was concentrated on those sunlit windows. He did not notice the other horseman, with his mettlesome beast barely under control, and he almost brushed its flank as he came round the sharp corner, his eyes anywhere than on the road ahead of him, still looking backwards.

"Mind where you're going, you clumsy fool!"

Walter Trewint raised his crop and slashed at Peter's mount. It kicked out angrily, catching Walter Trewint's mare on the fetlock. Both animals were scared. They were both young and full of life, and almost before their masters were aware of what was happening Walter was on the road, and Peter, in a wild effort to keep his mare away from the writhing figure at his feet, was thrown against the high wall which bounded the Trewint garden.

His leg was crushed by the weight of his horse's body, against the stone. The shock had been great, and the pain was tremendous. For one second he was unable to think of anything but the necessity to keep himself from fainting, and in that second his mount got out of hand.

Afterwards Peter was unable to say what had happened, but Adam, who had run hastily to the door to let Walter Trewint out of the house, only to find that he was too

late, and who had stayed in the hall, watching Peter go by, saw the whole affair.

"An' I won't saay a thing agaaainst that young Bart Nancecullom any more," he told his wife, as he was describing the scene to her afterwards, "fer a graand bit o' clane courage it couldn't be bate. Threw hissself onto those two hosses, 'e ded, without so much as a thought of the daanger! Two great rearin' bastes, an' one man on the road, an' another jest about to slip daown on the top of 'en! Squire, 'e come off almost at once. Leg's all in a terrible staate, they do zaay. An' 'e'd a' bin dead, too, with them hosses all ovver 'im, ef et hadn't a' bin fer young Nancecullom. Strong's a young bull, he is! Handled 'em boath 's if he'd a couple o' dogs to dale with!"

"And the Squire?" asked Zillah anxiously, wiping her hands on her apron as if she were getting ready to go and attend to him herself at the minute.

"Squire's taken 'ome. 'Twas that priest, that friend o' the Canon's, ovver to Clowance, as took care of the Squire. I knawed 'e was in some sort o' a sanitorium, or summat, but seems he's a doctor, too. Fixed up Squire 'andsome! You should a' heard 'en, Zillah! There was folks all around in a minute, the waay there allus is w'en there's an accident, and this priest, he jest took 'em all in 'and. 'Ad one running' 'ere, t'other there, gettin' hurdles an' carts an' planks o' wood, an' afore we knawed w'ere we waz, there was Squire on his waay back to the Manor!"

"An' that young Maaster Trewint, w'at ded they do to 'e?"

Adam grinned.

"Set 'en back on 'is 'oss! An' he wasn't best plazed! The baste wasn't likin' 'en ovver much, I'm thinkin', after that little set to! An' I guess Maaster Walter was scared!" He rubbed his hands together. "That'll tache 'en to wear great spurs to 'is feet fer a ride in the country! An' to bate up another man's 'oss!"

" Well, so long's the Squire's in no danger . . ." began Zillah tentatively.

" Doan't 'ee worry abaout 'e ! " Adam reassured her, patting her arm with affection.

She sighed

" Well, not a word to Miss Clowance, then ! She'd best know noathin' abaout et."

Her husband laughed.

" Ef you d'think as there'll be no gossip in this village 'baout Squire's accident," he chuckled, " then you'm not the woman I ded always think 'e."

" Then she'll hear soon enough," said Zillah, with decision, " an' she's best left alone fer a bit. She's aout with that Mason, talkin' 'baout 'er chicken, jest naow. Lave 'er alone, Adam "

And Adam went off to attend to his duties, nodding his head sagely.

Peter drifted back through a haze of pain, to find Bart Nancecullom and Père Anton bending over him.

It was several seconds before he could realise where he was or what had happened to him, but the familiar sight of the heavily carved posts at the end of his bed, the bed in which his forbears had been born and had died, reassured him. He smiled faintly, and tried to move.

He winced at the pain in his left leg. That reminded him. Once more he saw the rearing horse in front of him, the figure of Walter Trewint on the dusty road, and felt the blinding pain as his leg was crushed against the wall.

" Trewint ? " he whispered, and then laughed feebly at the sound of his voice, and made an effort to speak louder. " Trewint ? What happened to him ? "

Bart Nancecullom straightened up.

" He's all right now, sir, isn't he ? " he asked softly, stepping back in the hope that he had not been recognised.

Père Anton nodded, but Peter had seen Bart.

"Nanceculloom?" he said, wondering. "Was it you?"

"No!" The Jesuit laughed lightly. "It was Mr. Trewint, but he's at home by now. It was this young man who saved you both!"

Peter's hand went out eagerly.

"Then I owe you my thanks on two counts," he said, his voice now much stronger. "I was afraid that poor fellow had been killed. I shouldn't have forgiven myself."

Bart gave a snort of scorn.

"You needn't have worried yourself about young Trewint," he said shortly. "He deserved all that was coming to him and more. It was that ugly slash with his crop that made your horse rear. Served him right. He'd no business to come out of it with nothing but a shaking and a few bruises. If you hadn't been a bit of a horseman he'd have had his head crushed in, and probably a couple of ribs, too. Tough luck you should have had to back against the wall!"

"There was nothing else to do!" Peter smiled very faintly. He was feeling terribly dazed and weak. "But I must thank you, it seems, for myself, anyway! The last thing that I can remember was a distinct feeling that I should be in the road in another second."

"Oh, you were in the road all right!" Bart's laugh was more natural and hearty this time. "You slipped down beautifully, I must say. All I did was to take charge of the beasts. Poor creatures! They were scared out of their lives." He looked down earnestly at the man on the bed. "I'd best leave you alone, I think. What you need is a good sleep. I'll drop in to-morrow and see how you are, if I may."

"I shall be grateful."

The two men shook hands.

Père Anton went to the door with Bart, and then came back to stand silently at the side of the bed. His patient lay very still. Gently he felt the pulse of the

strong, slim-fingered hand that lay on the coverings. It was regular and firm.

Peter opened his eyes again wearily.

"Is this going to be a long business, Père Anton?" he asked, his eyes searching the other man's face.

The priest shook his head.

"No, I shouldn't say so. I'm waiting for Dr. Warner to come and confirm my opinion. My medicine and surgery are rusty, after all these years, I dare say, but I think you'll be about again in a couple of months. A fracture of the tibia. But you're a healthy man, and in the prime of life. You should mend easily. What you need now is rest and sleep. You had a nasty knock on the head. But you were lucky. That young man was in the very nick of time. You almost went to meet your Maker, my friend!"

His deep eyes smiled into Peter's.

The eyebrows went up, in that pale face on the pillows, in that expression so characteristic of the man.

"I thought so!"

"Sh!"

There was silence for a minute or two. Outside the open window the birds were singing. The sound of the splash of the fountain came up to them and the rustle of a light breeze in the trees. The sun was slanting into the room. Peter glanced round at the familiar objects, the great chest which had been in the house almost since it had been built, he had been told, the long mirror, framed in heavy old gilt, above the table where his brushes lay, all the details which he had learned to love since that morning when he had first awoken in the Squire's bedroom, to call it his own.

"I don't want to leave all this just yet," he said with a queer little twist to his lips, "but I find I don't dread the ——" he hesitated a moment, and then went on quickly, as if he were embarrassed to find himself talking on such a subject, yet needing to tell someone about it—"the thought of death, not in the way I used."

His blue eyes opened wide in a shy expression that made him seem hardly more than a youth as his glance met that of Père Anton. "I've learned a lot, since I've been here," he said softly, "from you, from the old Canon, from that old saint Benny Cowling, and"—his voice dropped—"from Clowance Zabuloe. When I go away from Zabuloe," he didn't notice the priest's start, "I shall be a happier man, even though I'm leaving behind me the one thing I've most wanted in all the world. Tell me, Père Anton, were you ever in love?"

The priest smiled.

"Yes, my friend. And I lost her. She died."

"And that was why you became a Jesuit?"

The older man pursed his lips.

"No I shouldn't say that. If she had lived I might not have become a priest, but it was some years after her death that I took my decision. I have had a very happy life, Sir Peter."

Peter examined the calm face for a moment before speaking.

"Yes," he said at last, "I think that the certainty of a future life must make it easier to be happy in this. It must make everything take a very different proportion."

Père Anton nodded.

But before answering he bent over the bed. The black-fringed lids had fallen over the blue eyes, the broad chest rose and fell evenly to the light breathing. Peter Zabuloe was asleep.

Dr. Warner, when he arrived, confirmed Père Anton's diagnosis, and congratulated him on the way he had set the broken bone.

"He'll soon be all right," he assured Marion and Bill Lanteglos as he was going. "He's in marvellous condition. This air's grand. It won't do him any harm to rest up a bit. You'll be staying on, I hope?"

"We'd intended to be here for a little while, anyway," she told him. "My husband's building this hospital,

you know. That's going to take a certain amount of time."

"Good. Then keep him amused. He's already fretting to get back to London. I don't want him to try to get about too soon. Six or seven weeks before he can think of travelling. Make him realise that, and take it philosophically. I shouldn't have thought it would be a particular hardship."

Marion smiled a little doubtfully.

"I know he had a lot of work in hand," she said tentatively.

"H'm. Well, it must wait." The doctor searched her face closely. "Rather an unreasonable passion for work from a man in his situation, isn't it?" he remarked meaningly—"but that's none of my business. Keep him quiet for the next day or two, anyway. No visitors. He's had a nasty crack on the head."

"Very well, doctor"

"And I'll be round again to-morrow or the next day."

"I'm sure he'll be all right. I can always get in touch with you!"

Still the doctor hesitated. Marion waited patiently. What did he want to say?

"Tell me, Mrs. Lanteglos," he asked at last, "I don't see any signs of delirium. He's got no fever. His crack on the head's a nasty uncomfortable thing, but no more. But he was talking about leaving the Manor! Sounds mad to me! What's it all about?"

Marion started.

"Leaving the Manor?" she repeated stupidly.

"Yes. Wants to get away at once, he says. There can be no question of that, you know. He mustn't be moved. But what's it all about?"

"He's said nothing to me about it," she answered firmly.

She had not breakfasted downstairs that morning, but in her room, and she had not seen Peter before he had left to visit the Vicar of Trewint. But she could

guess something of what this must mean. Clowance had made him certain that he could never persuade her to marry him, and he could no longer bear to live at the Manor after that. What a fool that girl was, and how she would love to tell her what she felt about her. To refuse Peter!

She felt the doctor's eyes searching her face.

"Ah, well!" he was saying, "let's hope it's only a passing mood! We can't afford to let him go, Mrs. Lanteglos. He's too well loved. Perhaps he'll change his mind!"

They were standing in the green drawing-room, and Marion saw the man's glance slide quickly over the portrait above the fire-place.

Poor Peter! All the neighbourhood knew his secret! No wonder he wanted to get away.

"Perhaps," she assented, rather coldly.

"Or perhaps someone else will!"

With a schoolboy's grin Dr. Warner held out his hand.

"Now I'm being abominably inquisitive and even impertinent! Forgive me, Mrs. Lanteglos, but I've a very great liking for Sir Peter, and I don't want him to go away."

And without waiting for a reply, he went quickly out of the room and out of the house.

CHAPTER XXVI

AND AFTER ?

"MARNIN', zur !"

"Good morning, Davey !"

"Feelin' better this marnin', zur ?"

"Grand, thank you."

Davey looked at his master's pale face and the dark shadows under the blue eyes doubtfully. He didn't look any too grand.

"There's zum letters, zur. Will 'e 'eve they before I wash 'e, or will I wash 'e furst, zur ?"

Peter glanced at the pile of envelopes in his servant's hand and hesitated a second or two. They didn't look very interesting. He wasn't expecting anything that was at all likely to be worth hurrying to read.

"Well, Davey, unless you think there's anything particularly worth reading . . ."

"There's one from Bodmin, zur. 'Tes *marked* 'Urgent.'"

Peter winced. Bodmin ! That didn't promise well ! But he held out his hand. Bad news didn't get any better for keeping !

"I'll just have that one, then. I'll read it while you get the water and things ready for me."

Davey fumbled among the envelopes and dropped several on the floor before he found the one he wanted.

"There 'tes, zur."

He waited a moment, anxious eyes on his master's face. The rumour of that visit on the day of the Squire's party,

now three days old, had not yet died down, though there had been no word from their master to confirm that it was true that he intended to leave the Manor. He and Mrs. Davey firmly intended to ask to go with him wherever he went, but they liked Zabuloe. They had settled into the life of the neighbourhood and got on well with the people. And they knew how much the Manor meant to their master. This letter from Bodmin might be from the lawyers, and perhaps the master would tell him to-day what was going to happen to them all.

Peter tore open the envelope. It was indeed from Sleeman and Keast. Old Sleeman had signed it. Almost without realising it he closed his eyes for a second or two before beginning to read, as if to put off for yet a few moments the confirmation of his banishment, which he felt certain that this letter must contain.

At last he opened his eyes and read :

Dear Sir Peter,

As you will recall, during our discussion at Zabuloe two days ago, the question of the method of payment for the estate arose. My client, Miss Glowance Zebuloe, is most anxious to effect this payment in actual money and not in shares as I had suggested. This, however, will entail a certain delay, and I am instructed to ask you to consider the six months' notice as prolonged by a further twelve months in order to allow the necessary arrangements to be made.

Miss Clowance Zabuloe will be very much obliged if you could make it convenient to inform her at an early date whether you are ready to fall in with this proposal.

Yours faithfully,

A. Sleeman.

Twelve months longer at Zabuloe !

The words swam before his eyes. He let the paper

drop and looked up into his anxious servant's eyes, which he found watching him eagerly.

"'Ted'n bad news, zur ?"

Peter smiled

"Bad news ? No, Davey. Rather good news. Come, wash me and tidy me up, and then ask Mrs. Lanteglos to come and see me."

The servant hurried out of the room.

Twelve more months ! Anything might happen in that time. It was a breathing space. Twelve more months at Zabuloe, seeing her in the lanes, meeting her in the villages, talking to her on his hospital committee at the old Canon's house ! If he couldn't change her mind for her in twelve months . . . !

Marion found him sitting up in bed with shining eyes when, washed and shaved and "redded up," as Davey put it, he received his friend

"Read this, Marion," he said, giving her the letter, "and tell me what you think about it."

Marion started as she read it. So *that* had been what the girl had come for ! That was what she intended to do ! To buy back the Manor ! To turn Peter out of the neighbourhood ! That was why she had refused to come to the famous party, and why she had chosen just that particular day for her visit ! But this letter . . . Again she read it, weighing each word.

She looked up at last to find Peter's eyes searching her face.

"What do you think of it, Marion ?"

She smiled.

"I should ask her to come *here* for her reply, Peter," she said, glancing back at the letter in her hand.

"*Here* ? Will she come ?"

She hesitated

"I don't know. But you could try, couldn't you ?"

"Then, do you think . . ." he began.

She nodded her head slowly.

"I think I should try," she said.

Her heart warmed as she saw the colour come to Peter's face and the light to his eyes at the thought of seeing that girl. Heaven send she was right to advise him as she had !

Clowance looked eagerly at the table in the hall as she came into the house, her arms filled with flowers. No letters, no messages for her. She threw her hat down on a chair and went into the parlour, dropping wearily into a corner of the sofa, brushing back her curls from her forehead.

No letter ! Had he replied directly to the lawyer—a business reply ? That would mean that he couldn't forgive, that it was too late ! He must have had that letter by the morning post. It was twelve o'clock. Plenty of time for a note to have been brought. But if he'd posted it ? Then she would hardly get it before the morning. All those hours to wait !

She picked up a book, read it for a few minutes and then threw it on one side. She wasn't taking in a single word ! There was a newspaper on a little table beside her. She unfolded it and tried to concentrate on the leading article. But even the head-lines failed to arrest her attention.

If he should have telephoned while she was out ! Would Adam have left a message for her on the table ? She tried to remember if he had ever done so. She had told him to a hundred times, but he could never remember, and she frequently heard about telephone calls hours afterwards, when it was too late to do anything about them. But to ask him—— ! She smiled at herself. Her famous Zabuloe pride had already given way so much that one more concession could mean nothing, yet she did not want to face Adam's meaning grin. He'd understand only too well what telephone call she was hoping for !

She'd wait a little longer.

To fill in time she went out to the farm behind the

house. There was always something to discuss with Mason!

Mason was busy talking to Bart Nancecullom, who came forward to greet her as soon as she appeared in the farm gateway.

"Have you heard the bulletin from the Manor this morning, Miss Clowance?" he asked cheerfully. "He was still asleep when I rang up, but that's a good sign."

Clowance looked at him in astonishment. Owing to the obstinate silence of Zillah and Adam she had heard nothing of Peter's accident. Almost immediately after Walter Trewint's visit, she had decided to go to Bodmin to discuss with her lawyer a means of prolonging the notice she had given to gain time. She had driven in to the town in her dog-cart, and had not got back until late in the afternoon. Zillah's outburst of the evening before had made her sensitive of showing herself in the village. She dreaded to see disapproving faces, to be asked uncomfortable questions before she had been able to make up her mind about things. That morning she had been in her garden, gathering late roses, but had seen no one who could have told her of yesterday's dramatic event.

Bart's astonishment was almost as great as her own, realising that she knew nothing about the accident.

"Hadh't you heard?" he asked in evident surprise.

"What do you mean, Bart?"

"About that accident. Why, it happened at your very gates!"

"An accident?"

Bart saw the girl's face drain of colour. So she *did* love that chap! He smiled reassuringly. Since saving his life he had come to have a very different feeling towards the Squire.

"It's all right," he said. "Sir Peter was a bit knocked about, but he's in no danger, they say. Just a matter of several weeks of complete rest and care."

" But how did it happen ? "

The sharp note of anxiety had not yet disappeared from her voice.

Bart looked hastily round him, saw that Mason had discreetly withdrawn, and came closer to her.

" It was young Walter Trewint's fault," he said seriously ; " he acted like an ill-bred brute, and lashed Sir Peter's bay with his crop, because he thought it came too close to him ! He had his own beast out of control, and the two of them were rearing at each other in a second. That young Trewint's no horseman. He was thrown at once, and Sir Peter, to save the fellow's life, pulled his mount into the stone wall. His leg was badly crushed. I think he almost fainted. Anyway he slipped off his bay. Luckily I happened to be there " He grinned a trifle sheepishly. " I have a way of being around when Sir Peter's anywhere near Trewint—or I had. That's all done with, now !—but it was lucky I was. I got hold of the two horses while that Jesuit friend of the Canon's, who was passing by, dragged Sir Peter out of the way, and made young Trewint get up. *He* wasn't much hurt. A bruise or two."

" But Sir Peter ? " Clowance was listening in an agony of suspense.

" A broken leg and some bad bruises. He took a bad knock on the head, too, but he was already conscious when we'd got him to bed up at the Manor. He had a good day yesterday, and, as I tell you, the news first thing this morning was that he was still asleep ! And he's in good hands. That Mrs. Lanteglos is a marvel ! "

For a moment Clowance stood silent. Then she looked up at Bart.

" You know I was trying to buy the Manor back ? " she asked very softly.

He nodded, smiling a trifle mockingly

" I shouldn't do that, Miss Clowance. That would be a pity." He hesitated. He knew that it was an impertinence that he was about to commit, but he felt that

it was up to him to ignore the conventions at that moment. It would help him to get back to the normal again. He'd let himself be ridden too long by his obsession. "Wouldn't it be better to—to go and share it with him?"

The last words were only spoken in the softest of tones, but the girl heard them.

"Bart!"

"I'm sorry. I've no right to say a thing like that!" He had flushed with annoyance with himself for giving way to that temptation. "Forgive me! And, look! There's Adam looking for you!"

He blessed the interruption!

She turned eagerly.

"Miss Clowance! There was a telephone call from the Manor! I couldn't find you, but Mason just told me as you was 'ere in the yard, so I thought as I'd better come an' tell 'ee."

"A message from the Manor?"

"Ess 'Twas to saay as the Squire would give 'ee the answer to the lawyer's letter ef 'ee'd be so good as to go up to the Manor to git et!"

He watched his mistress's face anxiously for a second, and then a broad grin broke out on his lips. All was well!

She had turned to Bart.

"Help me to harness Folly, Bart. I'll ride up at once!"

Bart Nancecullom and Adam Richards exchanged glances of entire satisfaction and understanding. Adam hurried back to the kitchen in high glee. He was the bearer of glad tidings!

Clowance hardly noticed the look of astonishment mingled with disapproval which greeted her on the face of Davey when he opened the great hall door of the Manor to her. She hardly waited for an answer to her question as to whether the Squire was alone or not. She passed David's stolid figure, crossed the hall, ran up the stairs and along the wide corridor, just catching a glimpse of lovely panelling and gleaming floors, rich

hangings and beautiful furniture—the Manor as she had always dreamed that she would one day make it.

But at the door of the Squire's bedroom, the room in which all the Squires of Zabuloe had slept, she hesitated, suddenly nervous. Her heart was beating irregularly up in her very throat it seemed to her, pulsing so that she could hardly breathe.

There was no sound from behind the massive door. Her own footsteps had been silenced by the rugs along the corridor and could not have given any warning of her approach. Twice she stepped close and raised her hand to knock, and twice she stood back, afraid to venture in. Then the sound of voices in the hall below sent her into a panic. No one else must come! She must go to him alone or she would never dare to do what she longed to do—to ask him to forgive her!

“Come in!”

Slowly she turned the handle, but kept behind the door while she opened it.

“Is that you, Marion?”

The door was wide open now, but it still hid her.

“Who is it?”

There was impatience in the tone. Clowance smiled to herself, more at her ease. The Zabuloe impatience! Gathering her courage, she closed the door gently behind her. The heavy curtains of the four-poster still hid her from its occupant. She stepped gently, noiselessly across the shining floor.

“Who is that?”

“Peter!”

In an instant she was in his arms, on her knees beside the bed, her head buried in the front of his coat—another coat like the one he had given Benny! She was very near tears for very happiness, and trembling, but Peter held her close in silence, and she blessed him for his understanding. Who else but Peter would have known to say nothing at all at just that moment, to ask no questions?

And when he did speak, some minutes later, it was only to ask her, very casually, out of a clear sky :

"Are you a good nurse, Clowance ? For I'm not going to wait two months to get married, you know ! "

THE END

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